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Andrei Mertsalov

# MUNICH: MISTAKE OR CYNICAL CALCULATION?

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## Contemporary Non-Marxist Historians on the Munich Agreement of 1938

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## From the Publishers

History long ago pronounced its sentence on what became known as the Munich treachery—the bargain made on September 29-30, 1938, by the governments of Great Britain and France with the leaders of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy.

Two photographs which appeared in the world press at that time symbolized the essence of the Munich deal. One of them showed a rolled-up map of Czechoslovakia, the one which was brought to the Munich Führer-Haus—the place where the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and the French Premier Edouard Daladier met with Hitler and Mussolini. The second picture showed the head of the British government on his return from Munich showing off a scrap of paper—the Anglo-German Declaration on non-aggression, which was signed when the shameful deal was made.

Chamberlain, Daladier, Hitler and Mussolini needed only one night to conclude that deal in Munich on September 30, 1938. But the road leading up to that deal had been quite long.

The preparations for the Munich Agreement went on for several long years. And according to declassified archives of many countries, a special role in those preparations was played by Great Britain.

London's policy in pre-Hitler times pursued two goals. On the one hand, Britain was trying to smooth out its contradictions with German imperialism and to turn the spearhead of Nazi aggression eastward, against the Soviet Union. On the other hand, it was seeking to establish in Europe a counterbalance to France, its imperialist ally.

In 1933 Britain's Prime Minister James Ramsay

MacDonald and the leader of Italian fascists Benito Mussolini came up with a "quadripartite pact" (Britain, Italy, Germany and France) which was even then designed to be "the first step of appeasement".

Hitler's first major steps in the field of foreign policy indicated that Germany had begun preparing for "a total war". On October 14, 1933 Germany walked out of the Disarmament Conference and five days later left the League of Nations. On March 13, 1935 Germany denounced the military provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, which prohibited it from building its own air force. Three days later a national military service was introduced in the country. At the same time Great Britain opened up another channel to the Nazis for building up their military power—an Anglo-German treaty was signed, permitting Germany to build up its Navy more than five times.

Impunity with respect to the Italian aggression against Ethiopia in 1935 and the policy of connivance at the actions of the aggressor on the part of Great Britain, France and the United States encouraged Nazi Germany to send its 30-thousand army to the Rhineland demilitarized zone unexpectedly in March 1936. That action was extremely risky for the Nazis, who behaved like a gambler staking his entire career on one move. But here, too, Hitler made good use of the anti-Soviet sentiments of the Western ruling circles, assuring them that he was only seeking to secure his rear for fighting against the Soviet Union.

The pre-Munich policy of "appeasement" of the aggressor culminated in the attitude of "non-interference" maintained by the Western powers with respect to the developments in Spain. Underlying this attitude was the fear of "a Soviet revolution" in that country and of the growth of the revolutionary movement in France where the Popular Front had just won parliamentary elections.

The Neutrality Act passed by US Congress in 1935 and which prohibited rendering military assistance to any of the warring sides also played into the hands of Nazi powers. Thus, putting the aggressor and its victim on the same level, US ruling circles deprived a country that had been subjected to aggression of the opportunity to acquire arms and military equipment for self-defense. At the same time Germany, Italy and Japan continued to receive loans, the latest in technology and strategic raw materials from the United States and Great Britain.



It became more and more evident that the policy of "appeasement" and the rejection of the numerous Soviet proposals on establishing a system of collective security in Europe and the Far East did not at all stem from delusions about the possibility of containing fascism by means of concessions (naturally, at somebody else's expense). The policy was to deliberately channel aggression to the East, against the Soviet Union.

This became particularly clear when the government of Neville Chamberlain took office in Great Britain in May 1937. That government sought to reach a mutual understanding with Germany and gave Germany a free hand in Central and Eastern Europe.

Having been given a free hand, the fascist powers openly began using military force on a large scale. Italy and Germany undertook a joint military intervention in Spain, providing support to the fascist rebellion against the republican government. Japan launched large-scale aggression against China.

A secret meeting of Nazi leaders was held in Berlin on November 5, 1937. Addressing the meeting, Hitler proclaimed *Lebensraum* as the basic principle of his policy. He emphasized that there was only one way to do this—by means of violence. The fascists planned to first capture Austria and Czechoslovakia. That action was to substantially enhance the Reich's military-industrial potential and to improve its strategic position as compared to that of Great Britain and France as well as the Soviet Union.

It was less than a year before the conclusion of the Munich Agreement. We will draw a chronological sequence of the developments during that last stage of the preparations for world war, so that the reader could form his own judgement on the basis of concrete historical facts.

**On March 12, 1938** the German army began occupying Austria. On March 14 Hitler signed a decree according to which Austria was annexed by Germany as its province (*the Anschluss* of Austria).

The Western powers accepted the occupation of Austria as a *fait accompli* and reorganized their diplomatic missions in Vienna into consulates general. London, Paris and Washington pretended they did not notice that an independent state had been taken off the political map of Europe. The Soviet Union was the only country that denounced the Nazi aggression and warned the world of the

disastrous consequences of connivance at the Germany's aggressive policy. The Soviet government insisted that a discussion of appropriate practical measures under the circumstances be started immediately either in the League of Nations or outside of it. This proposal of the Soviet Union was not supported by the Western powers.

The occupation of Austria played a significant role in the implementation of the far-reaching plans of the Nazis and strengthened their confidence in impunity of their aggressive actions. As a result of the *Anschluss* of Austria, Germany's territory grew by 17 per cent, and its population—by more than 6,700,000 people. Almost all the 50,000 soldiers and officers of the Austrian army became part of the Wehrmacht. Austria's industry and economy were made to serve the military needs of Germany. Reconstruction of strategic highways and railroads and the construction of new ones leading to Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Hungary were started. New airfields were built. Czechoslovakia found itself caught in Nazi tongs. Its new border with Germany made it easier for the Nazis to carry out aggression. In Czechoslovakia there was a sharp increase in the subversive activities of the Fifth Column—the Nazi party of Sudeten Germans, advocating the separation of Sudetenland from the republic.

**On March 15, 1938,** right after the *Anschluss*, the Soviet Union officially declared that it was ready to fulfill its commitments contained in the Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty.

**On March 24,** addressing Parliament, the British Premier Chamberlain declined the Soviet proposal on taking urgent collective measures in order to prevent the Nazis from taking further aggressive actions. He stressed that the British government could not undertake any obligations in a region where its interests were not affected as much as those of France and Belgium. The Premier made it clear in his speech that he was pleased with the fact that the Nazi expansion was developing in a direction favorable for the British ruling circles.

**On April 26,** taking into consideration the negative position of Great Britain and France, the Soviet Union clarified the conditions formulated in the Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty, under which the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia were to provide assistance to each other.



According to the letter of the agreement, the obligation of the Soviet Union to give assistance to Czechoslovakia came into force only if France also rendered assistance to the republic subjected to aggression. So France's refusal to defend Czechoslovakia completely released the Soviet Union from its obligations. However, the Soviet government considered it wrong to abandon the Czechoslovak people when they were in trouble. On April 26 the Chairman of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet Mikhail Kalinin made an extremely important clarification of the formulated treaty, stressing that the agreement did not prevent any of the parties from giving assistance to another party without having waited for France to come in.

In April Czechoslovakia received the first 40 Soviet planes, supplied in accordance with the Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty of 1937 which provided for rendering it assistance in getting equipment for its airfields and buying Soviet aircraft.

**On May 19** Germany started to amass troops near its border with Czechoslovakia. Information was received that the Nazis were planning a putsch for May 22 in the frontier regions of the republic and at the same time—an armed invasion. In connection with this, Great Britain and France made protests. On the night of May 20-21 partial mobilization was announced in Czechoslovakia. About 180,000 men were called to arms. Troops occupied the frontier fortifications. Due to the resolution of the Czechoslovak people to defend their country, the Nazi putsch in Sudeten and the surprise invasion of the Reich's armed forces were prevented.

**On May 22** the British Foreign Secretary, through the ambassador in Paris, explained to the French government the essence of Britain's position: the protest lodged by London against Berlin did not at all imply that Great Britain would enter into a war against Germany on France's side if France came forward to defend Czechoslovakia with which it was bound by a treaty of mutual assistance.

**On May 23** the French Minister of Foreign Affairs told the British ambassador in Paris that he was willing to exert pressure of any kind on Czechoslovakia in order to make the Czechs "listen to reason", i.e. to agree to compromise with Hitler. The minister added that if they refused to do that, France would no longer consider itself bound by the obligations of the Franco-Czechoslovak Treaty.

**On May 25** the Soviet government once again affirmed that in the event that Czechoslovakia was attacked, the Soviet Union would give it all necessary assistance. On the same day, in Paris, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Georges Bonnet in a talk with the German ambassador Johannes von Welczeck stated that France would not fulfil its obligations under the Treaty with Czechoslovakia if the Czechs took "an uncompromising stand" with respect to Germany. And two days later Bonnet, in a conversation with the Polish ambassador Jan Lukasiewicz, told him that the Nazi plan to divide Czechoslovakia up between Germany, Hungary and Poland was no secret to Paris. By that time the government of bourgeois Poland, under pressure from Hitler, had concentrated its invasion force—three divisions and one brigade—near Teschen on the border with Czechoslovakia.

**On May 28** Hitler issued an order to complete preparations for military operations against Czechoslovakia by October 2 and to make 96 divisions ready for action immediately in case military operations were started. On May 30 Hitler signed the Green Plan (on the occupation of Czechoslovakia).

Meanwhile, talks were started in Prague on **May 26** and lasted throughout the summer between the Czechoslovak government and the Party of Sudeten Germans, headed by Hitler's agent Konrad Henlein. The government agreed to consider the program for the territorial autonomy of Sudetenland. However, despite this, **on July 29** with Berlin's approval Henlein put forward even tougher demands. At the same time a campaign was launched in the British and French press aimed at influencing public opinion in favor of satisfying the demands of the Nazis.

**On August 3** Lord Walter Runciman arrived in Prague as the British government's authorized arbitrator and visited castles of German nobility in Sudetenland. As a result of his trip, he joins Chamberlain in reaching the conclusion that "in the interests of preserving peace" Sudetenland should become a part of the Third Reich.

**On August 17-24** the Commander of the French Air Force visited Germany upon Hitler's invitation. He was shown the latest models of aircraft and aircraft plants. The commander was impressed, as it was hoped he would be, and told the French ambassador in Berlin that if a war



broke out, France would not have a single aircraft left 15 days after it started.

And when all this was going on, the German Chief of General Staff Ludwig Beck, who knew the actual might of the Wehrmacht, was begging Hitler to postpone the preparations for the military solution of "the Czechoslovak question" until the necessary conditions were created.

The situation became more and more aggravated. There was only a month left before the term Hitler had set for the preparations for the invasion of Czechoslovakia would end. At that point the Soviet Union took all possible steps aimed at organizing a joint rebuff to the aggressive actions of Nazi Germany.

**On September 2** the USSR People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov affirmed once again to the French Chargé d'Affaires Jean Payart that if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union would give it military assistance. The Soviet government advanced to France and Great Britain a concrete program of action, the implementation of which would make it possible to change drastically the course of developments and to ensure the security of Czechoslovakia. That program envisaged:

1. The immediate convocation of a conference among the Soviet Union, France and Great Britain and the promulgation of a declaration on behalf of the three powers containing a warning that, in the event of German aggression against Czechoslovakia, the latter would receive assistance.

2. An urgent appeal to the League of Nations on the basis of Article 11 of its Charter in order to affirm the fact of a threat of German aggression against Czechoslovakia.

3. The holding of a meeting of representatives of the General Staffs of the USSR, France and Czechoslovakia with a view to settling practical issues involved in coordinating the actions of the armed forces of the three states in fighting the aggression.

If this issue had been raised in the League of Nations it could have meant a great deal for the provision of practical assistance to Czechoslovakia by the Soviet Union, in spite of the fact that the reputation of the organization had been seriously undermined by its failure to act when Ethiopia, China, Spain and Austria had become victims of aggression. It was up to Poland and Romania to let the Soviet troops cross their territories to join the Czechoslovak armed

forces in rebuffing Nazi aggression. However, the Polish government, having taken a strong anti-Soviet stand, refused to let Soviet troops pass through its territory. As for Romania, after negotiations, at the end of August, the Romanian government made it clear through the French ambassador in Bucharest that it would "close its eyes" to Soviet planes flying at an altitude of 3,000 meters and higher, since that was practically beyond reach of Romanian anti-aicraft artillery. Under the circumstances we may assume that the discussion by the League of Nations of the threat of Nazi aggression against Czechoslovakia and the adoption of a corresponding resolution, even if it was not unanimous, but by a majority vote, could have had great moral significance, especially if Romania had joined that majority.

However, Anglo-French diplomacy was trying hard to avoid anything that could cause "irritation" in Berlin. According to the British ambassador in Paris, Sir Eric Phipps, it was difficult to imagine anything that could make Hitler fly into a rage like the Soviet proposals. Misinterpreting the position of the Soviet Union, the Western press tried in every way possible to hush up the Soviet initiatives. The governments of Great Britain and France also worked hard to keep the information about the position of the Soviet Union a secret. Not even all the members of the French cabinet were aware of that position.

**On September 3** the Soviet ambassador in London, Ivan Maysky, informed Winston Churchill, an MP who criticized the government's foreign political course, about the Soviet position. Churchill immediately sent a written report of what he had learned to the Foreign Secretary Edward Halifax.

**On September 8,** in a private conversation with Halifax, Ivan Maysky informed him about the Soviet position.

**On September 11,** at a meeting with a delegation of the Labor Party which was opposed to Chamberlain's policy, the British Foreign Secretary denied that he had received full information on the position of the Soviet Union.

**On September 13** the French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier sent two representatives of his government to Prague. They were to make it clear to the President of Czechoslovakia Edvard Beneš that any possible concession



to the Sudeten Germans (i.e., Hitler) was now of vital importance.

**On September 15,** on agreement with Daladier, Chamberlain went to see Hitler in his residence in Berchtesgaden, in the Bavarian Alps. During those talks Hitler demanded that Sudetenland become part of Germany and that the Soviet-Czechoslovak and the French-Czechoslovak Treaties of mutual assistance be denounced.

Chamberlain agreed to the demand of the head of the Third Reich to turn over to Germany a part of Czechoslovakia's territory. He mentioned only that he had to hold consultations with the members of his cabinet, with Paris and Lord Runciman, and somehow "forgot" about Prague.

**On September 18** the governments of Great Britain and France reached an agreement on the plan providing for the separation of Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia and the replacement of the treaties of mutual assistance with the Czechoslovak Republic with the so-called system of "international guarantees".

**On September 19,** in a note to the Czechoslovak government, the Western powers make a categorical demand that the frontier regions, where Germans made up more than 50 per cent of the population, be immediately transferred to Germany. At the same time they insisted on the denunciation of the treaties of mutual assistance with the Soviet Union and France. The note ended with the message that London and Paris were expecting an immediate response from Prague, since Chamberlain intended to resume negotiations with Hitler no later than September 22. The Deputy Foreign Secretary of Great Britain said at that time that it was they (the British and French) who delivered an ultimatum to it (Czechoslovakia—*auth.*) for Germany. The ruling circles of France, having approved that shameful ultimatum, not only trampled upon their treaty obligations with regard to Czechoslovakia but also became accomplices in Hitler's blackmail.

The Czechoslovak people resolutely came out against the Western powers' encroachment upon the territorial integrity of their country. Klement Gottwald, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Czech Communist Party, stated in the republic's National

Assembly on September 19: "What London is advising us now is no less significant than what could be demanded from Czechoslovakia in the event of a lost war. We know that the Soviet Union will not hesitate to fulfil the existing treaty obligations. We shall not voluntarily let the republic be partitioned. If we are attacked, we shall defend ourselves. If we defend ourselves, we shall not be alone."

Having received the Anglo-French ultimatum, President Beneš made an official inquiry of Moscow on the same day about the position of the Soviet Union.

**On September 20** the Soviet government gave a prompt response to Beneš' inquiry. The Soviet Union again reaffirmed its adherence to the Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty and expressed its readiness to render immediate and effective assistance, even if France neglected its duty as an ally. The Soviet government at the same time informed the government of France about the content of its response to Beneš.

**On September 21,** addressing the League of Nations, the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs, Litvinov, informed the world public of the Soviet position. But the governments of Western powers continued to misinterpret the actual state of affairs and tried to make it look as though the Soviet Union did not intend to render support to Czechoslovakia.

On the same day the Czechoslovak government accepted the ultimatum of the Western powers. Demonstrations and rallies of protest were held all over Czechoslovakia. Their participants demanded that the government resign and national mobilization be announced.

**On September 22** Chamberlain went to see Hitler once again. During their negotiations, Hitler rejected the Anglo-French plan for "a settlement" and put forward new demands. He said that apart from Sudeten Germans, there were Poles and Hungarians living in Czechoslovakia, and he said that they should also have the right to autonomy. Moreover, it was difficult to determine the borders of the transferred territory, and Hitler did not feel like dealing with various commissions, committees and other organizations of the kind. He felt that the border had to be determined immediately, and that the transferred region should be occupied by German troops immediately. He set October 1 as the deadline for this.

**On September 23,** under public pressure, the



Czechoslovak government announced national mobilization. It was carried out quickly and was well organized; it demonstrated the high morale of the army and the people. Reservists started arriving at army barracks ten minutes after the decree was published.

On the same day the Soviet Union reminded the Polish government, which was threatening Czechoslovakia, that if Warsaw continued to pursue such a policy Moscow would respond with retaliatory measures. The Soviet Union said that if Polish troops crossed the Czechoslovak border, the USSR would be forced to denounce the Soviet-Polish Non-Aggression Pact unilaterally.

On the same day in Geneva Litvinov reaffirmed the Soviet Union's intention to respect its obligations as an ally of Czechoslovakia and proposed that Great Britain and France immediately hold a tripartite conference to elaborate specific measures for rendering assistance to that country. As before, the Soviet offer was left unanswered and kept secret from the world public.

Doing its utmost to prevent German aggression through collective efforts, the Soviet Union at the same time took the necessary measures to prepare its armed forces for providing immediate and effective military assistance to Czechoslovakia.

**On September 25** the Soviet military leadership informed the head of the French General Staff that the Soviet Union had pulled together about 30 infantry and several cavalry divisions in one specific region along the Soviet western border, as well as aviation and tank units. They were all put on the alert to render immediate help to Czechoslovakia in the event of aggression from Nazi Germany. Moscow dispatched the same information to Prague.

That very day the London Conference of the Foreign Ministers of Great Britain and France rejected Hitler's new demands. His response was to threaten to declare a general mobilization on the 28th of September. Chamberlain then sent a "personal message" to Hitler through his special representative.

**On September 27** Chamberlain asked Mussolini to be a "mediator" in convening a "quadripartite conference", in which Great Britain, France, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy would participate. It was never intended to have the Soviet Union participate in the conference.

**On September 29,** at one p.m., the conference of the four powers opened in Munich. To avoid publicity, only prime ministers and foreign ministers participated in it; the minutes of the meeting were not recorded, only unofficial notes were taken. The representatives of the Czechoslovak government were not even allowed in the conference room; they were put in one of the adjacent rooms and kept heavily guarded.

In his opening speech Hitler described the objective of the conference as such: to make the intervention of the German troops in Czechoslovakia look legitimate and preclude any violence. He reassured the participants that Germany had no other claims in Europe.

In the few hours the conference lasted Hitler managed to get from Great Britain and France everything he wanted. Only after the Germans and the Italians had left the room, on the night of September 30, the representatives of Czechoslovakia were asked to come in and read the agreement that had been already signed...

**On October 10** German troops completed the occupation of Sudetenland and a number of other regions. In early October troops of bourgeois Poland were sent to Silesia; in November Hungary occupied a part of Slovakia and the Transcarpathian Ukraine. The Soviet troops that were to help Czechoslovakia should the government ask (which it never did) remained near the western border of the Soviet Union until October 25, 1938, and then were sent back to their permanent location.

In March 1939 the Nazis began the total elimination of the Czechoslovak state.

**On March 13, 1939** a memorandum was circulated among the foreign diplomatic representatives of the British Foreign Office. That memorandum said that under no circumstances would the British government initiate any counteraction against the German aggression against Czechoslovakia.

**On March 15, 1939** Nazi troops occupied Prague. The Munich plot inspired Hitler and opened the way for fascist Germany to occupy more territories, not only all of Czechoslovakia, but eventually Poland, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, France, Yugoslavia, and Greece, as well. In fact, Munich opened the way to World War II.

However, the more distant the events of the recent past become, the more graphically they are seen. After the war many historians of various countries and various trends made studies of those events of fifty years ago, expressing views which were often far from objective.

This brochure offers the view of a Soviet historian on various historiographic studies of the events connected with Munich.

## Introduction

Munich is one of the biggest and oldest cities in Europe. Its name is associated with many glorious pages of history, and not only German history. At the beginning of this century Lenin lived and worked in this city and the newspaper *Iskra* was published here. The Bavarian Soviet Republic was proclaimed in Munich in 1919.

But the city walls also remember gloomy events. German fascism was born here as well as the NSDAP. Even before the fascists came to power in Germany the city has become a center of extreme reaction. I do not think it was accidental that it was in this city that the agreement on the partition of Czechoslovakia was concluded. It was signed on September 29, 1938, by the heads of government of Great Britain (Chamberlain), France (Daladier), Germany (Hitler), and Italy (Mussolini). German fascists began preparing for the separation of Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia and the elimination of the Czechoslovak state immediately after they invaded Austria in March 1938. They made wide use of agents of the Sudeten German Party, headed by Konrad Henlein. The Czechoslovak people were determined to defend their independence. However, the bourgeois government of Czechoslovakia, under strong pressure from Great Britain and France, yielded to Germany's ultimatum. The Munich Conference, convened on the initiative of Mussolini, adopted a draft agreement which he had proposed and which fully reflected Hitler's demands. Czechoslovakia was forced to give Germany not only Sudetenland but also regions bordering on Austria.

Following the Munich Agreement, the Franco-German and the Anglo-German Declarations of Non-Aggression



were signed. France, which had been bound to Czechoslovakia by a treaty since 1924, lost its reliable ally. The Munich Agreement destroyed the system of treaties of mutual assistance concluded between the USSR and Czechoslovakia and between Czechoslovakia and France. Under those treaties the Soviet Union had undertook to render assistance to Czechoslovakia in the event of aggression if such assistance was rendered by France. During the days of the Czechoslovak crisis the USSR resolutely reaffirmed its readiness to help Czechoslovakia under any circumstances (even if France did not fulfil its obligations). The Czechoslovak government, however, refused Soviet assistance.

The Munich Agreement was perhaps the most shameful diplomatic deal ever known to the civilized world. That agreement of the four leading powers of capitalist Europe became a symbol of "appeasement" of the aggressor, of virtually unlimited cynicism and base treachery. The agreement on the partition and eventual annexation of sovereign Czechoslovakia constituted a prologue to World War II that cost 50 million human lives.

How can we explain the fact that half a century later the interest in that agreement has not diminished but has even increased? That is probably because that agreement constituted a major event directly preceding the war. The conference of the four in Munich was a neuralgic knot of political, economic, social, diplomatic, moral and psychological problems.

The interest in the Munich Agreement may also be explained by the fact that the problems facing mankind today are no less complex than those of the thirties. As in the late 1930s, the world is divided into advocates of the arms race and their opponents. In our times the apologists of war find support in the camp of passiveness and try to split the ranks of the peace movement, using the same traditional methods that were used half a century ago. The most important of those methods remains anti-communism. Prominent West German lawyer-democrat G. Stuby has noted that there are many people in the West who have learned nothing from history and who would like to revive in some form the Munich model. There are people who are trying in every possible way to advance the claims of the revanchist circles in the FRG to the right to represent within the framework of a "single nation" the interests of

all Germans living in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the south of the continent. The radio station Free Europe complains about the plight of the former Sudeten Germans. The "Immer Gestrige" put forward groundless claims to the territory of Czechoslovakia, attempting to unleash a campaign of hatred against the Czechs and the Slovaks.

The balance of forces of peace and war in the international arena has of course changed dramatically over the past 50 years. The Soviet Union and its allies have attained military parity with the West and are resolutely maintaining it. The West German revanchists have far less influence as compared to their predecessors in the 1930s. The situation, however, is sharply aggravated by the fact that the threat of nuclear annihilation is looming over mankind like the sword of Damocles. Today's militarism threatens the very existence of the human race.

The historical lessons of the Munich Agreement are still quite topical. They remind us that the representatives of the military-industrial complex—producers of weapons, reactionary politicians and the military—while observing their parochial interests, are capable of resorting to aggression again and sacrificing the independence of states. The lessons of Munich also remind us of the danger posed by anti-Sovietism. The crisis of 1938 in Central Europe vividly reflected the problem of preventing war, which is such a burning issue of our times. Many people today ask why the supporters of peace who adhered to various political views and various ideologies—from Communists to bourgeois pacifists—failed at that time to prevent the aggression.

In the confrontation between the forces of war and peace, which has become today unprecedentedly acute, an active role is being played by historians of various trends—Marxist-Leninist, social-democratic, bourgeois-democratic, liberal, and conservative. Many of them are studying the history directly preceding World War II, including the Munich Agreement. More and more often those problems of the past become the subject of research of politicians, diplomats, writers and journalists.

The conservative as well as the neofascist interpretations of the Munich Agreement often serve the purposes of the apologists of modern militarism and anti-Sovietism. In the historical literature of many Western countries moderately conservative researchers prevail, and despite their



political sympathies and antipathies, these researchers sometimes make use of extensive factual material about the prewar history, thereby objectively contributing to the restoration of the truth. Marxist-Leninist historians (and the same can be said, to a certain extent, of researchers of other trends) proceed in their studies from the urgent tasks of the contemporary world, trying to really learn something from those fatal events of 1938-1939. The lessons learned could effectively serve the interests of the present struggle for a peaceful future of mankind.

The Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the Munich Agreement can be found primarily in the works of historians of the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia. For instance, the five-volume *History of Diplomacy* published in the Soviet Union in 1959-1979 and a number of other studies note that that agreement never had any juridical force. Its objective was to prepare for a criminal war and it was concluded without the participation of the parliament and the people of Czechoslovakia; they had to accept it under threat of force. Historians from socialist countries have examined all the main aspects of that event—the aggressive course of the fascist powers, first of all, of Germany; the participation of smaller imperialist predators in the partition of Czechoslovakia; the policy of encouraging aggression pursued by the conservative circles of Great Britain and France with the support of influential forces in the United States; the inconsistent and controversial position of the bourgeois circles of Czechoslovakia; the struggle of the Soviet Union and realistically-minded forces in other countries for the creation of a system of collective security as well as for the implementation of the treaties of mutual assistance between the Soviet Union, France and Czechoslovakia.

Much attention has been paid in the Soviet Union, the GDR and Czechoslovakia to the publication of documents dating back to the eve of World War II. Among them a prominent place belongs to V. I. Dashichev's two-volume work *The Bankruptcy of the Strategy of the German Fascism. Historical Essays. Documents and Materials* published in 1973 and the collection *Documents on the History of the Munich Plot of 1937-1938* (1979) prepared jointly by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. The documents of the

Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) included in that work deserve special attention. It is noteworthy that the communists gave a rather realistic assessment of the situation in Czechoslovakia.

For example, in a letter describing one of the sessions of the Central Committee of the CPC, held on December 11-12, 1937, the party leadership warned that it was possible that the enslavement of Czechoslovakia would be carried out not by means of open armed aggression but by means of diplomatic blackmail under the cover of hypocritical peacemaking. Extremely pertinent was the warning against the intention of the right-wing forces in Czechoslovakia itself to capitulate to fascism. The authors of the leaflet *"Firmness! Resolution! Unity!"* issued by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on March 15, 1938 were quite justified in saying that each new concession to the aggressor would only lead to catastrophe.

The General Secretary of the CPC Klement Gottwald, speaking at a pre-election party meeting in Prague-Liben on May 18, 1938, expressed his conviction that the Soviet Union would fulfil its obligations to Czechoslovakia. He unmasked the attempts of the British ruling circles to hand Czechoslovakia over to Germany and thereby encourage the fascists to extend their aggression further to the East. At a rally of the citizens of Prague on the Slavic Island on September 9 Gottwald emphasized that at issue was not a settlement of the differences between the Czechs and Germans in the Czechoslovak Republic, but rather the very existence of independent and democratic Czechoslovakia. In an address to the peoples of the world made on September 27, 1938, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia put forward an idea which has retained its political significance to the present day. In the address it was said that the communists and other progressive forces in Czechoslovakia upheld the cause of all of civilized mankind in its fight against the madness of the barbarians threatening the whole world. The main idea contained in the CPC documents of 1937-1938 is this: only a resolute struggle using all possible means joined by the powerful anti-fascist movements of other nations can save the people of Czechoslovakia from the horror of fascist slavery.

Similar ideas are contained in the documents of the German Communist Party. In early October 1938, in an address "To the German People" ("An das deutsche Volk!") the Central Committee stressed that in the last days of September the fascists had put Germany in danger of becoming involved in a new world war. Munich became a mockery of the right of peoples to self-determination. The Munich deal meant in fact the partition and enslavement of Czechoslovakia. Guided by anti-popular interests, the Nazis resorted to one military provocation after another.

If the reader compares the analysis of the developments of those years contained in the documents of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the German Communist Party with the real events in the years that followed, he will realize that the policy chosen by the communists on the eve of that great battle of the peoples against the fascist aggressors was the correct one.

The Munich Agreement has been studied extensively in Western scientific and publicistic literature on the history of international relations of modern times, including the history of World War II, the history of the countries which participated in the Munich Conference as well as that of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. Special studies have been made on this subject, and memoirs and documentary works on the Munich Agreement have been published. So a voluminous collection of documents on the foreign policy of Germany has been published in many countries.

An examination of the Munich Agreement, just as a study of modern history in general, is bound to be organically linked to the entire public life of the state. Studies of the past serve not only "pure science", not only the purposes of propaganda, as some bourgeois historiographers would have it, but also domestic and foreign policy of today, economy, military policy and the development of all spheres of public life. Historiography is linked in many ways with society and to a large extent reflects its features. It is heterogeneous and is constantly developing, reflecting national peculiarities.

In non-Marxist historical literature there are two quite distinct conservative trends—extremist and moderate, on the one hand, and liberal and bourgeois-democratic, on the other. Let us recall in that connection the names of world-famous scholars of a liberal orientation, fathers of major scientific schools who made a considerable contribution to the studies of the history of the two world wars—Henri Michel (France) and Fritz Fischer (FRG). Professionalism goes hand in hand with objectivity in the works of these

historians. For instance, while conservative trends, especially extremely conservative ones, are known for their deliberate distortion of the past in the interests of political conjuncture, liberal and especially democratic studies are free from falsifications.

The literature of many Western countries on modern history is dominated by moderate conservatives whose studies are characterized by gross contradictions. They have made certain progress in research but they have not at all abandoned previous ideological stereotypes. Nevertheless, anti-communist ideas do not stand out in their studies as graphically as in the works of extreme conservatives. Neofascist publications such as the magazine *Nation Europa* (FRG) and books by David Hoggan (USA) are ideologically quite close to those works. They do not throw any new light on history, but abuse historiography for the purposes of propaganda. These are in fact old Nazi publications, only adjusted somewhat to meet the tastes of today's average reader. Those publicists, for exampe, having accepted many of the fascists' versions of the developments of the 1930s and 1940s, often subject Hitler and his associates to superficial criticism. In all the postwar years such literature has not managed to win over the general reading public in the Federal Republic of Germany nor have neofascist politicians managed to get their deputies to the Bundestag. Nevertheless, this literature should not be ignored. History shows that under the right circumstances it is exactly by virtue of its primitive character that this kind of literature may become influential.

Social-democratic literature occupies a special place. It is in many ways close to liberal and bourgeois-democratic historiography. It also has strong humanistic and anti-militarist tendencies. Its subject is quite specific; attention is focused primarily on the history of the labor movement. Thus, in the study of Julius Braunthal, an Austrian representative of that type of literature, on the history of Internationals, questions of the foreign policy of European powers in the 1930s are discussed in connection with the activities of communist and social-democratic parties. However, social-democratic literature is not homogeneous either. Its right wing is characterized by anti-communist prejudices, while its left wing is virtually free of such prejudices.



The bourgeois scientific and publicistic literature of various historiographic trends is most widely represented in West Germany, Great Britain, France and the United States. Anti-communist concepts are more or less typical of the conservative historiography of those countries.

Many conservative historians, in their studies of the official interpretation of the agreement found in the documents of Chamberlain and Daladier, offer false arguments about Chamberlain as a peacemaker, about the military weakness of the Soviet Union and its unwillingness and inability to help Czechoslovakia. The arguments of modern neofascist authors, who address historical issues quite frequently, are in many cases borrowed directly from the Nazi propaganda of the 1930s. They make groundless assertions about persecutions of their brothers—the Germans in Czechoslovakia, about the inability of its government to maintain order in the country, about the helplessness of the Czechoslovak state. They say that Czechoslovakia presented the main threat to world peace, that the Munich Agreement was nothing but a revision of the unjust Versailles Treaty and that it gave back the Sudeten Germans the right to self-determination, which had allegedly been taken away from them.

The influence of "Atlantic solidarity" can also be found in conservative literature. For instance, some West German historians ignore any responsibility of the ruling circles of Great Britain and France for the Second World War. In the interests of NATO's unity, those historians attempt to revive the Munich policy of the West.

Another striking feature is that some researchers, whether deliberately or not, narrow the framework of the phenomenon they study.

For instance, attempts are often made to present some motive for the policy of "appeasement" as being the only motive. Thus, the discussion of the Munich Agreement is limited exclusively to the sphere of ethics. The Munich deal is examined outside the context of its prehistory, outside its connection with the political course of Germany and other fascist states, outside of the context of the policy of "appeasement".

It would be wrong, of course, to object in principle to any study of that deal that examines the subject in terms of good and evil. Addressing Chamberlain, Churchill once said that he had been offered a choice between war and

dishonor. And even though he chose dishonor, he was still faced with a war. Those words are often cited by modern historians. And in essence they are just words, for the Munich plot was in fact the lowest point of moral disintegration. Many liberal researchers and journalists call this agreement indecent and shameful. Indeed, that agreement marked a complete break with humanistic norms in international relations. However, this is just one aspect of that agreement's significance. And although it is an important aspect, it does not provide a complete picture.

In general, modern non-Marxist studies on the Munich Agreement can be characterized by pluralism—a variety of trends, schools, approaches, methods and views. At the same time, the postwar period has been characterized by substantial changes in the view of the development of the 1930s: primitive reactionary stereotypes have given way to comparatively objective assessments of the Munich Agreement; the openly apologetic treatment of the fascist powers, on the one hand, and Great Britain, France and the United States, on the other, has been substituted by a more balanced approach. It is in this connection that the American historian Teddy J. Uldricks noted that the blind devotion to the cold war rhetoric does not dominate any longer.

Various circumstances played a role in this. Many people began to see clearly that the past had been distorted. They made correct conclusions from the difficult experience of World War II—breeding hatred toward other nations, creating an "enemy image", as had been done by the Nazis, is not only immoral but very dangerous. Sober-minded figures in the ruling circles of the West also demanded that historians objectively study the past and provide certain political recommendations on the basis of an unfalsified examination of the past. Marxist-Leninist studies and the publication of documents and memoirs also had an influence in this respect. The historical works and memoirs of the prominent Soviet diplomat and scholar Ivan Maysky, which are well known even outside the Soviet Union, contributed a great deal to the presentation of a full and genuine picture of the crisis of 1938. Soviet historians have made a certain contribution with their critical works on the bourgeois historiography of the period preceding WW II. Among them are S. L. Kudryashov, L. A. Mertsalova and I. A. Chelyshev, who were kind enough to



share with this author invaluable advice and unpublished materials.

## The Prehistory of World War II as Seen by Researchers and Publicists

The Munich Agreement was part of a policy, and the extension of that policy was World War II. Progressive historians have every reason to believe that both the first and second world wars were unleashed by imperialism, by the desire of imperialist states to expand the spheres of their influence and by their fight over sources of raw materials and markets. While making emphasis on this main socio-economic factor of war, we by no means want to downgrade the ideological, psychological and geographical factors, the role of the individual, etc. That is what the West often accuses us of. At certain points in time, all factors become more or less influential in certain countries and regions.

Indeed, both world wars had a common origin, however, the situation on the eve of the last war was quite different. As imperialists continued their traditional struggle for a redivision of the world, a new factor emerged—the intention of two hostile groupings to resolve their contradictions at the expense of the only socialist state at that time, the Soviet Union, and to eliminate socialism altogether or at least weaken it. The war was initiated by a whole block of fascist states. Marxist-Leninist historians have shown that the prewar period had other special features as well: the antiwar forces of the 1930s and their nucleus—the international workers' movement—lacked unity, there were the well-known sectarian errors of communist parties, social-democracy lacked consistency, bourgeois pacifism tended to be weak; and realistically-minded politicians of the West tended to isolate themselves.

Historians-democrats give a quite similar assessment. It should be noted, for instance, that the writers working for the West German magazine *Blätter für Deutsche und Internationale Politik* believe that fascism with its aggressive wars was born out of capitalism and call the criminal campaign against the Soviet Union the most horrible aggressive war of our times, a war aimed at enslavement,

conquest and destruction. The works on the origin of fascism and war by left-wing socialist historian Reinhard Kühnl (FRG) are quite interesting. Meanwhile, conservative literature is characterized by a tendency toward silence. In some studies of the past war the events that preceded it were simply omitted. Certain authors would like to revive imperialism. One of the forms they use is the personification of the history of war. Such historians attempt to substitute the broad theoretical problem of the origin of war with one rather narrow component part of that problem—the question of the personal responsibility of a political leader for unleashing a war.

The thesis about common (although not equal, as some authors believe) responsibility for that war is prevalent in conservative literature. That thesis is most comprehensively discussed in the works of the prominent moderate-conservative historian Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (FRG). He asserts that Germany was primarily responsible for the war, while all others were "accomplices". Those accomplices included the British, who were allegedly "seeking peace at any price", the countries of Southeast Europe with their "egoism", "Polish statesmen with their arrogance and overestimation of their own capability" and, above all, "the conduct of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1939".

Jacobsen's thesis contains a kernel of good sense—it points to the main responsibility of Germany for the war. However, one should not identify Britain's share of responsibility with its "search for peace at any price". The policy of "appeasement" was something far more complex than just some unlimited and irrational pacifism. Jacobsen's concept reveals a desire to make all European countries equally responsible for the fate of the world. But Great Britain—one of the main guarantors of the Versailles Treaty and possessing real economic and military power to fulfil those guarantees—cannot possibly be put on the same level as small European countries, though some of them in fact were small imperialist predators.

Assessments of the character and consequences of the Munich Agreement in the works of historians of various trends tend to vary greatly. The neofascist versions should immediately be qualified as apologetic. They are represented most graphically in neofascist historical and political publications in West Germany. Those versions are associated with vociferous attacks on the Versailles Peace



Treaty of 1919 and call it the most deep-rooted cause of World War II. And the Munich Conference of 1938 allegedly only introduced some minor amendments to that treaty. Information about the Versailles Treaty is also needed in order to understand conservative historians' argument about the "guilt complex" of the West toward Germans.

The peace settlement in Versailles did indeed have an imperialist and unjust character; it was extremely unstable and was bound to lead to armed conflicts; it most definitely contributed to the war of 1939-1945. The well-known Soviet writer Leonid Leonov put it like this: the fathers of the treaty dug the graves of their grandchildren, and they really were buried in them during World War II. For the working people of Germany the Versailles Treaty meant double exploitation—by both German and foreign capitalists, but it did not affect the foundation of German militarism which Western imperialists intended to use as a strike force against the Soviet Union.

Communists had actively fought for a revision of the Versailles Treaty. That demand was put forward by the Communist International (Comintern) back in 1922. Nevertheless, the Versailles Peace Treaty was not the main cause of the war, as neofascists claim. Just like WW I, which was ended by that agreement, the Versailles Peace was a product of capitalism.

German fascism used the Versailles Treaty very skillfully for the purposes of breeding hatred toward the victors, of breeding chauvinism and war hysteria. One of the first places where demands to abolish the Versailles Treaty were made was the program of the Nazi Party adopted on February 24, 1920. That was of great help to the fascists in coming to power and later in unleashing the war. At that time they presented themselves to the people as defenders of an offended nation and appealed to the outraged national pride.

However, the revision of the Versailles Treaty was far from being the ultimate goal of the fascists. It was just a starting point for the implementation of their plans for world domination.

Many historians in the West refute quite convincingly the speculations over Versailles. They dethrone the neofascist thesis based on one of Hitler's propaganda speeches about the completely reasonable and limited goals of

Germany and convincingly prove that fascists wanted more than to just get back the regions of the former Bismark empire. Versailles was just a stopover of sorts.

Czechoslovakia by no means owed its independence to the Versailles Conference. The national development of the Czechs and the Slovaks had a thousand-year history, and they had waged a long and persistent struggle for sovereignty. The Austria-Hungary empire had fallen during a general upsurge of the world liberation movement, which had been in large measure a result of the October Socialist Revolution in Russia. The formation of Czechoslovakia was a progressive phenomenon. Czechoslovakia had earned its right to take a place among independent states.

The regions of Czechoslovakia taken away from it in Munich had never been part of pre-Versailles Germany. This fact alone makes references to Versailles and its unjust decisions groundless. The slogan of self-determination of nations in that case served the purposes of fascist propaganda (as it now serves the purposes of neofascist literature); it was simply a way to cover up and justify the annexation. The national question in bourgeois Czechoslovakia in fact had not been solved. It was resolved only by the people's government, which ensured equality for all nations. However, assertion about the suppression of Germans in that country and about the disintegration of the state are false from beginning to end. Just the opposite, the Germans in Czechoslovakia had a privileged position as compared to the majority of the population. The annexation of Sudetenland by the Nazi empire did not mean national self-determination for its population.

The right of nations to self-determination was used by the most reactionary elements of the German monopolistic bourgeoisie as a cover for its aggressive plans. In the same manner they disguised their parochial goals inside Germany with such slogans as "people's unity", overcoming class contradictions, etc. The annexation of Sudetenland ran counter to the vital interests of the majority of its population and played into the hands of a limited group of reactionaries from the fascist party of Henlein. Later these reactionaries became part of the occupation apparatus of "the third empire" in the Czech lands.

The basically correct interpretation of the Munich deal as a treachery of great powers with respect to a smaller



country has gained popularity in the West. The well-known West German liberal historian Golo Mann characterizes that agreement in a similar way. It should be noted, however, that such an assessment reflects only one aspect of that event. Whatever the responsibility of the ruling circles of Great Britain and France, the main actors in that drama were the fascist states, and Germany in the first place. My arguments are far from being abstract. A one-sided assessment here may be the result of either the inability of the researcher to comprehend the development of events as a whole and identify its substance, or a failure to understand the basic difference between traditional imperialism which emerged at the turn of the 20th century and imperialism under fascism. Such mistaken assessments are directly connected with the blunders politicians made on the eve of World War II. But seeing in the Munich deal only the treachery of Great Britain and France with regard to Czechoslovakia could objectively contribute to a revival of fascism.

Western historians and publicists of the 1960s condemned Munich and the capitulatory policy of Great Britain and France (Michael Freund, an extreme conservative from West Germany called it "a big capitulation"). Lately, a negative attitude to that act has come to prevail, if not dominate. It is criticized even by those historians who maintain incorrect views on the Anglo-Franco-Soviet negotiations of 1939. The moderate conservative Christian Zentner has even used terminology which is characteristic of Marxist-Leninist historiography. In his opinion, the governments of Great Britain and France gave Czechoslovakia away to the aggressor. The Swiss moderate conservative Werner Rings believes that the Western powers let themselves be blackmailed. They decreed the capitulation of Czechoslovakia and sacrificed a reliable ally.

Many Western historians have made successful attempts to show the true place of the Munich Agreement in history and its role in unleashing World War II. They contend that it opened the way for Germany to Central and South-East Europe, an area which had become a sphere of German political and economic interests.

The prominent West German historian Wolfgang Schieder maintains that Munich had buried all the hopes for collective security and peaceful politics in the spirit of the League of Nations. Zentner makes a direct connection

between Hitler's decision to attack Poland and the fact that the British and the French "inspired" him to do this in Munich. The British publishers of the three-volume *Der Zweite Weltkrieg* are fully justified in calling that agreement "the tragic culmination of the Anglo-French policy of appeasement". They also cite the speech delivered by Churchill on October 5 in the House of Commons in which he said that it was not the beginning of the end but the end of the beginning. In the 1960s the liberal West German historian Paul Sethe came to the conclusion that "without Munich World War II would never have been unleashed". In the years that followed that idea was repeated by many historians, including Frenchman Jean-Pierre Azéma. Charles Bloch, author of the book *Le IIIe Reich et le Monde*, published in Paris in 1986, drew the following conclusion: "Munich did not only fail to save the world but made the war inevitable. It was the last opportunity to stop Hitler and prevent a world catastrophe, and that opportunity was missed."

Much attention in the works of Western scholars is paid to the significant events on the eve of World War II, which in some way or another grew out of the Munich Agreement. There is a popular thesis in conservative historiography that a revolution took place in the diplomacy of the Western powers after Germany occupied the Czech regions on March 15, 1939. Did Great Britain and France abandon their capitulatory policy after Germany flagrantly violated the Munich Agreement and thereby revealed that the policy of the Western powers was bankrupt? Alas, they did not. Germany's crude blackmail of the representatives of Czechoslovakia as well as the Western powers on the eve and during that conference should have made them question the integrity of their partner. Nevertheless, the agreement was signed. And Germany violated it literally on the next day. For example, a plebiscite planned in a number of regions in Czechoslovakia was not held; the country's new borders, contrary to the agreement, were drawn on the basis of outdated ethnographic statistics from 1910; international guarantees of Czechoslovakia's borders were not provided. In early 1939 Hitler arrogantly demanded that Czechoslovakia reduce its army by half, hand over to Germany a part of its gold reserve, observe neutrality in its foreign policy and annihilate its citizens of Jewish nationality. He announced that Czechoslovakia was completely



dependent on Germany and if necessary Germany would not hesitate to invade new regions of the country.

The governments of Great Britain and France had sufficient grounds to see the bankruptcy of their Munich policy well before March 15. They did react in some way or another to the above-mentioned actions of Germany but the protests from London and Paris were rather formal in nature. Fascists persisted in their course. On March 22 Germany occupied the Lithuanian port of Klaipeda, and on April 7 Italy launched aggression against Albania. Considering the circumstances, Great Britain was forced to give guarantees to Poland, Romania and Greece. However, those promises were of little value. It was then that Lloyd George, in a conversation with Ivan Maysky, said that Chamberlain was breaking all the records of stupidity since Great Britain would be able to help the countries of Central and South-East Europe in the event of a fascist aggression only with the participation of the Soviet Union. But the British Prime Minister did not want to make any agreements with the Soviet Union. The documents and memoirs of the participants of those events show that Western leaders were still guided by an outdated political thinking. They did not seek to establish an effective system of collective security in Europe. And the diplomacy of Great Britain and France did not undergo any "revolution". Their position with respect to the fascist aggression against Poland testifies to this.

Many historians in the West point to the existence of a close relationship between that aggression and Hitler's fantastic success in Munich. They believe that a direct threat to Poland emerged immediately after the occupation of Prague. According to a moderate conservative from West Germany, Josef Henke, after Munich "the occupation under any circumstances of Warsaw became Hitler's immediate goal" and "unshakeable constant". The author refers to the statement of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy Galeazzo Ciano who after his meeting with Hitler on August 12, 1939 became firmly convinced that Germany had decided to "resolve" the Polish issue by attacking Poland no matter what.

Some Western historians are intrigued by the military aspect of the Munich deal. The authors of the three-volume *Der Zweite Weltkrieg* cite the words of William Shirer, a famous liberal American publicist and historian,

who called Munich "a catastrophe" for France. He puts special emphasis on the fact that France lost for the allied forces 35 well-armed Czechoslovak divisions. The authors of the book stress that in 1938 the Czechs and the French were twice as strong as the Germans. The assumption that France's defeat in 1940 was predetermined by the Munich Conference is shared by Jacques Fauvet and other French historians.

It is difficult not to agree with that assumption.

## The Munich Agreement and Germany

Many historians, particularly those in West Germany (Christian Zentner, Hermann Graml and others), pay a great deal of attention to the role of the Munich Agreement in German history. In their opinion, that agreement started a new period in the fascist policy of strength; the weakness displayed by the British and French in Munich "inspired" Hitler and "encouraged the aggression". The same idea is expressed by the moderate American conservative Gordon A. Craig: according to him, Munich convinced Hitler of his infallibility, and his policy became intolerant.

While in principle agreeing with these assessments, I must make an important reservation. The authors do not make it clear enough that after the Munich Agreement it was not the substance and the goals but only the form of the policy of the fascists that changed. Even the seemingly correct argument of Werner Conze (FRG) that the annexation of Bohemia and Moravia marked the beginning of the superpower aggression is unacceptable. The author proceeds from the false assumption that the occupation of Austria and the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia was legitimate. Some readers may think my remarks just fault-finding. I would therefore like to remind the reader that such frivolous interpretations of the past directly concern the vital interests of European nations. A joint Soviet-Czechoslovak communique adopted in April 1987 says: "Strict compliance with the principle of inviolability of the borders drawn as a result of WW II and postwar developments is a necessary condition for maintaining lasting peace in Europe. Any attempt of revanchist forces to violate that



principle causes serious damage to relations based on trust and good-neighborliness."

I would like to call the reader's attention to the following factor. Even today there are advocates of the erroneous thesis about two phases in the development of German fascism—a nationalist phase and an imperialist phase. Some Marxist publicists also made that mistake in the 1930s and 1940s. It is claimed that while the fascists were gathering German lands they were nearly patriots... It is impossible to comprehend the essence of the Munich Agreement without understanding the issue of "the two phases". Indeed, there were several periods in the development of German fascism, but from beginning to end that development took place exclusively within the framework of imperialism. This idea is shared by many prominent conservative historians. According to Walther Hofer (Switzerland), the policy of German fascists was aggressive even before Munich, although this was not so obvious. Jacobsen rejects the idea of a "peaceful" period in the development of fascism before World War II. He thinks that it is most definitely "a lie" that Nazi foreign policy in 1933-1939 was divided into the periods of revision (of the Versailles limitations pertaining to Germany) and expansion. He sees the time leading up to 1937 as a period of covert preparation for aggression, which after 1938 acquired the form of open expansion—starting with threats to use force and ending with the unleashing of war in 1939. All this leads to the following conclusion: Germany's participation in the Munich deal can in no way be regarded as an effort to unite German lands.

As for the question about the place of the Munich Agreement in German history, the following aspect of the problem deserves attention. Some Western historians believe that in Munich Great Britain and France saved the German fascist regime from collapse. As far as I know, that idea was first expressed by W. Schkrach, who was in charge of the personal archives of the former President of Czechoslovakia T. G. Masaryk, immediately after the conference in a conversation with the Soviet plenipotentiary representative in Prague S. S. ALexandrovsky. Schkrach's judgement is confirmed by the recent study of C. Bloch, a liberal, who used the materials of Sir Nevile Henderson, the then ambassador of Great Britain to Berlin. According to Schkrach, the German regime had decayed to such an

extent that it could not have survived even a brief war against just Czechoslovakia. Hitler looked proud and vociferous only to the outside world. That soberminded leftist bourgeois politician was convinced that the leaders of the countries participating in the conference were afraid of perishing under the ruins of fascist Germany; they feared an inevitable revolution which would affect not only France and Great Britain but also all the other capitalist states of Europe. Further on Schkrach recalls that during his meeting with Chamberlain the fascist leader stated bluntly that not just a war but a mere failure on his part would lead to the collapse of the Nazi system and the triumph of Bolshevism in Europe. Chamberlain didn't hesitate to agree with that, which explains his zeal to save the regime. The ruling circles of France and Czechoslovakia were quick to come to the same conclusion.

Today, half a century later, historical science has in its possession facts which in principle confirm the correctness of Schkrach's judgements. The fear of social revolutions in both imperialist groupings paved the way to Munich. This conclusion is not dismissed by the arguments that at that time there was no obvious revolutionary situation in European capitalist countries, and that the propaganda bogy of anti-communism invariably served Hitler's aims in his negotiations with the ruling classes, whether in Germany or abroad.

I believe that Schkrach's argument that a mere failure would threaten the very existence of the fascist dictatorship is quite valid. I would like the reader to bear in mind that the foreign policy of the German fascists was highly adventurous. It made sense that in their attempt to conquer the entire world they had to oppose it. It is noteworthy that even Germany's allies, with the exception of Japan, soon became its satellites and then withdrew from the alliance. The global program of German fascists was not based on any real superiority in terms of their economic and military might. They counted mostly on the ideological contradictions between their main potential enemies—the Soviet Union and the Western powers—and on the division between them, hoping to defeat them one by one in the course of brief wars. Indeed, under such circumstances any more or less serious failure could have been fatal.

The history of the Czechoslovak crisis also confirms this argument. At that point the arrogance of the fascists already had no limits. After the failure of the anti-government putsch in Czechoslovakia in September 1938 and the arrest of its participants, Berlin made an official announcement that a corresponding number of Czechoslovak citizens would be immediately arrested on the territory of the empire. Germany threatened to execute an equal number of Czechoslovaks if the participants of the putsch were executed in Czechoslovakia. This was in fact the beginning of the well-known practice of using hostages to which the fascists resorted so often during the war. In those troublesome days in September the threats against Czechoslovakia grew stronger as the Western powers made new concessions to the aggressor.

Was the fascist regime in such a state of decay in 1938 and as weak from the military point of view as Schkrach claimed? I find this conclusion somewhat categorical. On the other hand, it is impossible to agree with the opposite conclusion, which most diplomats in Berlin had reached, for they had obviously been hypnotized by fascist propaganda and the open demonstration of German military might. I believe that Germany was capable of enduring a protracted war against Czechoslovakia. Its potential was greater than that of Czechoslovakia. Whether the fascists would have been capable of breaking the resistance of the Czechs and the Slovaks if they had been united and resolute in their struggle is a quite different matter. Modern history is full of examples of successful struggles of small nations against the aggression of great powers. Let us recall the US invasion of Indo-China. Czechoslovakia, surely, would not have been left alone in those concrete circumstances in 1938. An all-European war was quite probable, and Germany was not ready for that.

That was proved by the experience of 1939-1945. That was also pointed out by objective observers during the crisis of 1938. The British ambassador in Moscow A. Chilston, in a conversation on September 8 with the Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union V. P. Potemkin, expressed his well-grounded opinion that the German army was not as dangerous a force as was being claimed by the Nazis. W. Bernhardt, the author of the book *Die Deutsche Aufrüstung 1934-1939*, which was published recently in West Germany, showed that the Wehrmacht's strength in those years lay in the fact that Western powers overestimated its potential. British

and French military experts thought it inconceivable to infringe upon its positions.

I would also like to mention the view of an authority in this field—General L. Beck, the former Chief of Staff of the German Army. According to him, in 1938 German troops were not capable of waging a major war due to weaknesses of a military-technical nature, which became evident in the course of the aggression against Austria, as well as to the military and economic inferiority of Germany. (It is noteworthy that in July 1938 the position of prominent German military leaders was known to Great Britain and France.) That assessment has given rise to popular opinion in West German literature that if Germany had attacked in 1938 it would have been defeated in the Second World War before the first shot was fired.

The reader may object by reminding me of the quite spectacular successes of the Nazi Wehrmacht in 1939-1942. But here it should be kept in mind that Poland's defeat, for instance, was determined by the fact that it had a relatively weak army, that it was at a disadvantage in terms of its strategic position and had poorly prepared defense constructions, etc. The military advantages of the Wehrmacht were enhanced by the faulty foreign policy of the reactionary Polish government and by the new treachery of the great powers with regard to a state which had fallen victim to aggression. Nor can France's defeat be explained only by the Wehrmacht's superiority, as extremely conservative historians and neofascist publicists contend. And the demoralizing effect of the Munich course on the will to resist the aggressor and on the formation of a military-political doctrine was very strong. Therefore, the potential of France, whose armed forces were the strongest in capitalist Europe, were not used to the full.

Finally, the successes of the Wehrmacht in the first months of the war against the Soviet Union and in the summer of 1942 were due mainly to the miscalculations of Stalin and his advisers, in particular, in their assessment of the date of a possible German attack, and their failure to put troops concentrated near the borders on the alert. The victories of the Wehrmacht could not be planned ahead of time. To a large extent they depended on subjective, temporary factors. It was those factors that the fascist leaders counted on. Their *blitzkrieg* doctrine which proved successful in a number of aggressive campaigns of 1939-



1941 did not work in the war against the Soviet Union. Germany was forced to wage a protracted and hopeless war. Neither the Wehrmacht nor the military economy of the country could endure that war, regardless of all the frantic efforts of the government.

Many West German historians have turned in their studies to the origin of the *blitzkrieg* doctrine, proving that the fascists used it deliberately. They take into consideration the relative economic weakness of Germany and the unstable situation in German society. In his article "Back to the International Fist Law" Peter Krüger quite correctly cites the Nazi principle of complete freedom of action, disregard for international obligations or any other ethical and legal norms as other reasons. It is noteworthy that the *blitzkriegs* of 1939-1941 are regarded by the author as a logical extension of the prewar policy of the Nazis (the *Anschluss* of Austria, the occupation of the Sudeten region and all Czech lands).

In modern literature another argument, quite well substantiated, is popular—that the ruling circles of Nazi Germany were in constant fear of a possible repetition of revolutionary upsurge. In the semiofficial ten-volume *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg* we find the following: "The fear of revolution underlay Hitler's policy. Despite intensified armament, he would not let the production of consumer goods be cut down... The workers could not be controlled exclusively by methods of propaganda maneuvering. Economic concessions were needed as well. However, the strategy of social bribery was not sufficient, the situation required other methods—those of brutal terror." The authors of that work believe that, in contrast to 1914, on the eve of World War II "the broad masses in Germany were seeking peace", they "did not support the aggressive war, despite Goebbels' campaigns" and "the military policy of the regime did not have a broad political basis". Manfred Messerschmidt, one of the authors of that ten-volume work, concludes that "first and foremost, they had to prevent another 1918, a breach of the country's unity, another 'strike in the back'". The thesis about the threat of revolution striking the invincible German Army in the back was advanced by the Keiser generals in an attempt to rehabilitate the German General Staff and was widely used by Nazi propaganda.

The policy of the Nazi rulers in the economic sphere

was bound to endanger the regime since the economy was not developing on a healthy, peaceful foundation. This is reflected in the works of a number of non-Marxist experts on the economic history of Germany. Michael Geyer, a moderate American conservative, contends that the German leadership realized back in 1935-1936 that the country would soon face a dilemma—either it would have to deal with an inevitable crisis of the economic and state system or launch a war. According to Winfried Stadtmüller, one of the authors of *Deutsche Geschichte* (1984), Germany's national debt in 1933-1938 grew from 13 to 50 billion marks and the empire was bankrupt. Karl-Heinz Janssen (FRG) says that "the unbridled adventurist arms race depleted the economic potential of Germany very quickly. By 1938 the lack of manpower and scarce raw materials had already left the country's leadership with no other choice but to begin an immediate expansion of the empire's sphere of domination". In a speech before the generals of the Wehrmacht on August 22, 1939, less than a year after Munich, Hitler referred to the hopeless state of the economy as one of the main factors justifying the invasion of Poland.

Ernst Topisch, an extreme conservative from Austria, suggests in his book *Stalin's Krieg* that Chamberlain and Daladier delivered a heavy blow in Munich to the opponents of the Nazi regime inside Germany. Representatives of the German conservative opposition called upon the British not to make any concessions during the negotiations with Hitler. However, the Munich Conference upset their plans. According to the social-democratic West German historian Richard Löwenthal, "Hitler's diplomatic victory in Munich delayed for many years the planned actions of the oppositionists". In a number of studies this idea is linked with attempts to justify the weakness of the German bourgeois opposition to Nazism.

Indeed, the most reactionary circles of the bourgeoisie in Germany were closely connected with Nazism. The opposition to Nazism in other strata of that class was in fact quite weak. No doubt the differences in the foreign political platforms of the conservative leaders of the opposition L. Beck and C. Goerdeler, on the one hand, and the Nazi leadership, on the other, were very superficial. To a certain degree this fact justifies the actions of British diplomacy, which gave a cold reception to German oppo-



sitionists' efforts to establish contacts with the Western powers. Though the communist movement and other anti-fascist movements in Germany offered a real alternative to the Nazi regime, the right-wing forces in London and Paris were perfectly happy with that regime as a partner.

But let us get back to the subject of our discussion. Despite the subjective intentions of the advocates of the thesis that the Munich Agreement was a blow to the opposition inside Germany, we have to admit that this thesis makes sense. Nazis were scoring one goal after another—the remilitarization of the Rhine zone, the rebuilding of a strong army, the *Anschluss* of Austria... They got away with everything. And naturally that weakened the positions of the anti-fascists. The average German bourgeois refused to believe that the economic growth, largely a result of the militarization of the country, was about to end in either an economic disaster or a new war.

What were the goals that the German fascist imperialists set themselves in the course of the crisis in Central Europe which they created? The objective of the fascist powers' diplomacy and the propaganda (the official bodies of Great Britain and France had a similar objective) was to make it look as though their program did not go beyond the unification of Germans into one state. Even the idea about the need to complete a bourgeois revolution in Germany was voiced. Chamberlain was convinced, or at least tried to convince others, that after getting Sudetenland Hitler would leave Europe alone forever. Direct or indirect traces of that erroneous thinking can be found in Western historiography to the present day. In particular, the essence of the Munich Agreement is downgraded to the transfer of Sudetenland to Germany.

Soberminded observers, however, saw clearly that such a position was faulty even before the agreement was concluded. For example, S. S. Alexandrovsky, in a talk with the Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs on May 30, 1938, stressed that the issue of Sudeten Germans was just a convenient pretext for launching aggression. Its main goal was the eventual enslavement of all of Czechoslovakia. He added that a doctor who hopes to cure a patient by treating his symptoms rather than the causes of his illness is a bad doctor. In reality Germany regarded the Munich Agreement as a means of making Czechoslovakia

completely dependent on it. That is noted by some West German historians who state that the Nazi authorities committed an act of violence against Czechoslovakia.

The economic aspects of the aggression of Nazi Germany in the prewar years, including its aggression against Czechoslovakia, are most comprehensively discussed by Hans-Erich Volkmann, one of the authors of the first volume of the above-mentioned ten-volume *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg.* In the chapters devoted to the economic preparations for the war, he writes about the economic benefits brought to the empire by each new aggression.

Examining the roots of the aggression against Czechoslovakia, a leading liberal expert on the history of World War I F. Fischer shows that the plans the fascists announced had been elaborated by German military monopolies and other reactionary circles even before the war of 1914-1918. They included the *Anschluss* of Austria, the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Poland and countries in South-East Europe. One of the top priorities in those plans was the question of German minorities in those countries.

It should be further noted that the annexationist Nazi program involved much more than just the subordination of all of Czechoslovakia. In a letter to the plenipotentiary representative of the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia of May 25, 1938, the People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the USSR wrote that Hitler could care less about the Sudeten Germans as well as the Germans living in Tyrol. What he did care about was the conquest of lands and strategic and economic positions in Europe, and this posed a threat to not only the Soviet Union, but the Western powers as well. The Czechoslolvak delegates in the international commission on the implementation of the Munich Agreement stressed that the territory of Czechoslovakia served simply as a convenient bridgehead for the attainment of Germany's goals in the East.

This same argument can be found in modern historical literature. For instance, Axel Kuhn, a liberal historian from West Germany, using the Hossbach Protocol as reference (Friedrich Hossbach was Hitler's aide, who recorded the Fürer's address to the highest party and military ranks of the "empire" on November 5, 1937), shows that Hitler was not at all guided by national ideals, despite his propaganda.



He needed Austria and Czechoslovakia for military-political purposes, so as to exclude any threat from the rear in a contemplated war against France and to prepare a springboard for attacking the Soviet Union. According to Christian Zentner, the invasion of Austria and the Munich Agreement "geographically and strategically" were determined by the interests of the coming aggression against the Soviet Union.

In recent years many documents have been published in West Germany confirming the real objectives of German fascist imperialism in Eastern Europe. Those documents are useful in understanding the place of the Munich Agreement in the development of the German expansion to the East. In their book *Der Krieg im Osten 1941-1945*, liberal historians Michael Bartsch, Hans-Frieder Schebesch and Rainer Scheppelmann state that the attack on the Soviet Union was in accordance with a certain tradition. Back in 1914-1918 the owners of German monopolies demanded that the Baltic regions, the Ukraine, Byelorussia, the Donbass region, the Crimea and the Caucasus be taken away from Russia. In connection with this, the authors recall the German occupation of Soviet territories in those years. The book mentions that in January 1919 Hugo Stinnes established the so-called *Generalsekretariat zum Studium und der Bekämpfung des Bolschewismus* (General Secretariat to Study and Combat Bolshevism). Together with other organizations, this organization of powerful reactionary capitalists from Germany paved the way for Nazism coming to power. The authors emphasize that after the October revolution in Russia the economic interests of German imperialism in Eastern Europe were supplemented by the intention to destroy the world's first socialist state.

A number of Western historians have looked to other factors leading to the aggression against the Soviet Union. The prominent West German historian Andreas Hillgruber, a moderate conservative, points to four motives for that aggression: extermination of the Bolshevik leaders; occupation of territory with a view to letting Germans settle in the best parts of Russia; a sharp reduction of the Slavic population and its subjugation; establishment of "imperial commissariats" (*Ostland*, the Ukraine, Muscovia and the Caucasus) under German "viceroys". Their main tasks

were to include: to squash any recollections among the population of the former greatness of the Russian state, to turn people into blind obedient servants of their new "masters", and to make the country an inexhaustible source of raw materials and food. Hillgruber believes that that war was different from others. The objective was not only to annihilate a great power but also to establish on its ruins a German "eastern empire", to build the so-called "German India".

Some Western historian disregard the fact that, although anti-communism was one of the main motives for the aggression against the Soviet Union, it was not the only one. Others, on the contrary, reduce the anti-Bolshevist aspect of the aggression to a meaningless phrase. Both extremes are wrong. It would be naive to believe that the Nazis invaded Russia in order to help its population overthrow the Soviet regime and restore tsarist rule and the power of the Russian landlords, as some publicists wrote during the war. Nazis recognized no other power in the whole of Europe except German power.

Clarifying the real goals of Nazism is quite important from a political point of view. Nazi propaganda disguised the hostility toward humanity in general with anti-communist slogans. It is significant that not only Nazis but also "pacifists" emphasized only the anti-communist objectives of Nazism. That tactic was unmasked back in the 1930s—there were no hotbeds of communism in the mountains of Ethiopia, where the Italian fascists' invasion was disguised by anti-communist slogans. The global aggressive program of Nazis cannot be explained by their anti-communism alone.

Marxist-Leninist historiography, in particular the works of L. A. Besymensky and V. A. Dashichev, points out that the Nazi plans involved more than just the conquest of the European continent. They were seeking world hegemony. That idea is widely reflected in West German literature, in particular, in the works of Hillgruber who claims that the Nazis intended to implement their global program stage by stage—first they were to occupy Europe, including the Urals, then complete the colonization of Africa and other continents, and eventually wage a struggle against the United States for world domination. It is significant that the author, having made a special study of the role of the war



against the Soviet Union in the overall Nazi program, came to the definite conclusion that the eastern campaign was a decisive factor in Hitler's general military concept.

As is known, the German aggression against Czechoslovakia was joined by Poland and Hungary. Poland invaded the Teschen region of Czechoslovakia and Hungary—the southern part of Slovakia and the Transcarpathian Ukraine, which had a population of about 1,000,000 people, and in March 1939 the whole of the Transcarpathian Ukraine. Werner Rings writes that after its annexation of the Czech region Poland received a "gift of friendship" from Germany—60,000,000 marks in the form of a loan for purchasing machines and equipment. The Polish government, obviously copying the methods of Nazi propaganda, launched a loud campaign against Czechoslovakia over the rights of the Polish minority in that country (there were 80,000 Poles living in Czechoslovakia). Condemning this campaign, Czechoslovak diplomats quite justifiably reminded Poland of the Ukrainian minority in that country, which amounted to seven million people. Even the French ambassador to Berlin André François-Poncet, who was close to Daladier, admitted at that time that Poland was obviously helping Germany in its actions against Czechoslovakia. Reactionary Polish leaders bluntly rejected the attempts of Soviet diplomacy to make them refrain from siding with Nazi Germany against Czechoslovakia. We should also mention the anti-Soviet position of the Romanian government during the Czechoslovak tragedy. Both Poland and Romania rejected the request of French diplomats that they let Red Army troops pass through their territories to give assistance to Czechoslovakia (at that time the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia had no common borders). Incidentally, the Polish government took the same position in August 1939, when at the Moscow negotiations on the establishment of an effective system of collective security the question of providing assistance to Poland itself was being discussed. Thus, the Munich Agreement of 1938, which marked a sharp turn in international relations, was a product of the aggressive policy of the fascist powers, and of Germany in the first place. The position of the two major capitalist states of Europe in those days—Great Britain and France—constituted an important prerequisite for that agreement.

# The Munich Policies of Western Powers in Historical Literature

Many historians in fact identify the Munich course with the general policy of "appeasement", which was pursued by the Western powers in the 1930s. They justifiably view the Munich Agreement as the culmination of the policy of connivance at and direct encouragement of the aggressor. In any case, the conduct of the British and French representatives at the Munich Conference of 1938 cannot be understood without clarifying the essence of the policy of "appeasement".

Many non-Marxist historians call the line of the Western powers in the 1930s as wobbly and unstable. I believe that this is just an outward impression. In reality "appeasement" was a characteristic feature of the foreign policy of Great Britain and France. Governments changed and so did the nuances of foreign political doctrines. But the basic principle remained the same. Even the governments of the Popular Front in France did not succeed in changing the general movement of the country along the course which went down in history as the Munich policy. The course aimed at using German militarists in pursuing anti-Soviet goals can be traced in the policy of the ruling circles of those countries. This course began with the Versailles Peace Treaty when the Entente powers presented Germany with a mandate for a military occupation of the territories of Soviet Russia.

The policy of "appeasement" to some extent goes back to the times when the victorious powers established military alliances in Central and Southeast Europe aimed at stopping the spread of communism. The position of the Western powers with respect to the remilitarization of the Rhine zone by Germany, to the aggression of Italian fascists against independent Ethiopia, to the Japanese aggression against China, to the joint German-Italian aggression against republican Spain and to the invasion of Austria was an extension of this policy.

Munich was not something unexpected or fundamentally new in the policy of Western states. A number of historians adhere to the well-grounded position that the abrogation by Great Britain and France of the majority of the Versailles limitations greatly contributed to the increased aggressiveness of Germany. In 1935 the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was concluded. The British, without notifying the French and in violation of the Versailles Treaty (actually cancelling it unilaterally), made the unprecedented growth in Germany's naval forces legal. Many historians note that the League of Nations failed to fulfil its obligations to Spain. The issue of the Italo-German invasion of that country and the active participation of Germany and Italy in the civil war on the side of the insurgents was removed from the agenda of the League of Nations and transferred to the so-called London Committee on Non-Interference. That committee chose not to prevent the aggressive powers from interfering in Spain's affairs.

I have already mentioned the attention Western historiography gives to the economic aspects of the foreign policy of the major imperialist states before the war. Bernd Jürgen Wendt and some other researchers have reached the well-founded conclusion that the Western powers in fact deliberately gave up their influence in Southeast Europe to Germany for the sake of "economic appeasement" of the aggressor. A study by researcher Hans-Jürgen Schröder is entitled exactly that—*Economic Appeasement. On the Policy of Great Britain and the United States with Respect to Germany on the Eve of World War II.*

Lately a position openly favoring the policy of "appeasement" has gained popularity in conservative literature. The authors of such publications in fact shirk any responsibility for encouraging the aggressors, and, therefore, for unleashing World War II, off the ruling circles of Great Britain and France. The West German historian Georg von Rauch gives a primitive interpretation of the policy of "appeasement". According to him the reason for that policy was the supposed threat of Western Europe being partitioned between the Soviet Union and Germany. But what about the proof of such a threat?... The author doesn't bother to provide any proof.

"Appeasement" is also being explained by the false argument that Germany alone was responsible for World War II. Messerschmidt and other authors of the first volume of the ten-volume *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg* claim that the imperialists of the Western powers were not responsible for the unleashing of the war, erroneously putting all the blame on Germany. It is significant

that many publications in West German neofascist magazines make serious accusations against the authors of that volume as regards "Germany's guilt". As a matter of fact, neofascist publicists are noisily campaigning against that thesis even regardless of the fact that Messerschmidt and his co-authors gave them a pretext for doing so. According to them Great Britain in those days was "enemy No. 1" of German hegemony because it occupied the position of "a key holder". Here they ignore the role of the Soviet Union, the only country in the 1930s which consistently advocated collective security in the face of aggression, and its decisive contribution to the defeat of Nazism. It should be recalled that the quite modest role of Great Britain in World War II was to a large extent determined by the pre-Munich policy of its ruling circles. It was those circles that deprived the country of its allies on the continent and put it on the verge of a military catastrophe in 1940-1941. It was only the German attack on the Soviet Union and the actual shift of the war toward the East that saved Great Britain.

The numerous versions of "appeasement" found in Western literature do not allow for just one interpretation. This is true of the thesis about the military and even naval weakness of Great Britain. At that time Great Britain was indeed lagging behind Germany in the military field, e.g., in the number of its ground forces, in the combat experience and combat training of those forces. This was also true of the British air force (to a lesser degree), but can in no way be applied to its naval forces. At sea Britain had always been superior to Germany.

That Great Britain was behind in the military field became obvious and uncontestable only in the summer of 1940, if we disregard the correlation of forces at sea. But in order to end up in such a position, Great Britain had to make continued efforts for years to destroy the Versailles military limitations set for Germany, leave its allies to the mercy of fate and sacrifice them, thereby increasing the military and economic potential of Nazism. In other words, if we can indeed speak of the relative military weakness of Great Britain, it must be seen as a direct consequence of "appeasement" and under no circumstances the other way around.

The concept of military inferiority was already being used by British reactionary circles to justify their position at the time of the German invasion of the Rhine zone. The



motive underlying that policy was analyzed by a well-informed researcher of international affairs Harold Nicolson. He proved that at that moment Hitler was trying his luck. The members of the German government warned him that such a step was bound to lead not only to a financial catastrophe but to an aggravation of the diplomatic situation as well. The General Staff stated that if Great Britain and France acted together, Germany would have no chance of resisting them. However, the British government of Stanley Baldwin reasoned differently: Hitler's military defeat or just a mere failure of the Rhine operation as a result of an Anglo-French ultimatum would lead to the victory of communism in Germany. In 1938 Chamberlain actually continued the Baldwin course. Some Western newspapers wrote then that it would be a mistake to assume that Chamberlain was afraid of Hitler. The essence of the British policy boiled down to hatred of Soviet Russia and fear of the growing workers' movement in Great Britain and particularly in France.

The references a number of historians make to the pacifist sentiments in Great Britain, France and other countries cannot be disregarded completely. Such sentiments did exist. Painful memories of the horrors of World War I were still fresh in the minds of the people. To a certain degree these sentiments influenced the policy of those countries. This can be traced in the very term "appeasement". Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to call the pacifist sentiments of the British and French people the main factor determining the Munich course of the Western powers.

The communist and workers' movement in the Western countries rightfully equated fascism with a new war and condemned the encouragement of the aggressors. The words about the "salvation of the world" continually used in the official propaganda of London and Paris are not convincing. That propaganda claimed that any démarche against aggressors would trigger off a general European war. Some people at that time did become convinced that Chamberlain allegedly had some kind of a mystical belief in his special mission to appease mankind.

And today the assertions of a number of conservative historians about the genuinely peaceloving intentions of the ruling circles of Great Britain and France are unacceptable. Such authors clearly abuse the humanistic senti-

ments of their readers. For instance, Jacobsen writes that the British and the French were trying to preserve peace at any cost. I see an inaccuracy in that, to say the least. One cannot speak of the British or the French in general. They did not have an unanimous position on the issue of war and peace. One should bear in mind that the policy of those countries in the 1930s was in the long run formulated by the ruling bourgeois élite, and the concept of "peace" for that élite did not have a general human meaning but was rather a condition for preserving its domination. A liberal West German historian Axel Kuhn believes that the preservation of peace was Britain's "ultimate goal", but he explains this not by Chamberlain's idealism but by the fact that a new war would have created a threat of Great Britain losing its world positions. In this context the arguments of a number of British historians about "appeasement" being a natural extension of the British diplomatic tradition of settling conflicts by peaceful means seem absolutely groundless. I also regard the very thesis about the existence of some peace-loving tradition in the history of British imperialism as controversial. In the specific conditions of the 1930s the formula "peace at any cost" was not only immoral but also senseless: it did not ensure peace and only brought the war closer.

The blind advocates of "appeasement" were naive enough to believe that all the German claims stemmed from the unjust Versailles Treaty. The prominent British historian Alan Taylor, a conservative, writes that in the 1930s not only the ruling Conservative Party but also the leaders of the Labor Party were guided by a desire to compensate for the "offense" of the Germans in Versailles.

The propagandist cover-up of the treachery with regard to Czechoslovakia (to rectify the injustice of Versailles; restore the right of Germans to self-determination) was also used at the Munich Conference. However, its underlying premises were totally false. Let us assume that some people in the West were concerned about the "poor Germans". By the way, the very fact of the armed occupation of a country by one of the great European powers was viewed differently in the 1920s and 1930s than it is today. Many people then regarded the ban on the introduction of German troops in German Rhineland as an insult. In principle, the concept of a guilt complex should



be rejected. The invasion of Austria and Czech lands had nothing to do with the Versailles Treaty.

There is still a noticeable tendency in conservative literature to narrow down the problem of "appeasement" to Chamberlain's personality. This is wrong if only because the policy of "appeasement", as was shown above, can be traced back to the foreign policy of Great Britain and France before Chamberlain. And it was not completely abandoned after his retirement. The British Premier was backed by influential representatives of financial capital and by political and military leaders, whose interests he represented in the government. The policy of those groupings was far from being the Prime Minister's personal policy. This is also true of the course aimed at resisting the aggressor, reflected in the establishment in 1942-1945 of the anti-fascist coalition, which was not the personal policy of Roosevelt, Churchill and de Gaulle.

For the sake of a comprehensive historical analysis and in the interests of peaceful coexistence today, we should not forget about the heterogeneous nature of the bourgeoisie, especially bourgeois society in general, and British society in particular. For instance, the prominent British statesman Lloyd George, actively called for the great European powers putting up strong resistance to Nazism back in April 1938. Later he criticized the Munich Agreement as a major defeat of the Western democracies. Alfred Duff Cooper, first lord of the Admiralty, was forced to retire because he disagreed with Chamberlain's policy.

A relatively objective description of Chamberlain's role is given by Karl Newman (FRG). I do not agree with all the author's conclusions about the prehistory of World War II, but Newman does establish definite ties between Chamberlain and his class, his party, which is quite important. The author believes that the British leader pursued the interests of the highest aristocratic circles of Great Britain; these circles were very hostile to all democratic movements, not only communist, and were afraid not so much of Soviet Russia as of the threat democrats inside Great Britain might pose to their domination.

Believing that the future of European bourgeois democracy was closely associated with Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain and ultraconservative circles decided to let Hitler do away with Czechoslovakia. According to the author, an influential group of British "appeasers" actively

supported "Third Reich". They recommended that Chamberlain "give up" Sudetenland to Germany, persuade France to refuse Czechoslovakia assistance and thereby sacrifice it. According to Newman's information, Runciman, one of the leaders of the Liberal Party of Great Britain at that time and head of the British mediatory mission to Czechoslovakia, was only supposed to make it look like an impartial resolution of the argument between the Nazi party of Sudeten Germans and the Czechoslovak government had to be reached. In reality he was a judge, administering a sentence which had been passed by London in advance. Bloch believes that Chamberlain's role was similar to that of Oskar von Hindenburg, Keiser's general of the Weimar Republic, and other German conservatives who had helped bring the Nazis to power. Therefore, as the author correctly notes, just like Hindenburg, Chamberlain bears responsibility for the horrifying catastrophe which was World War II.

Chamberlain is also openly praised in modern historical literature. For instance, in his book about the origins of World War II Philip Bell portrays Chamberlain as a man who saved Great Britain from a defeat which would have been inevitable if it has not been for the Munich Agreement. According to Bell, the Prime Minister was a clever, courageous and energetic politician. Nevertheless, most historians do not tend to exaggerate Chamberlain's role in British diplomacy in the 1930s. Larry William Fuchser, Chamberlain's American biographer, generally trying to portray him in the best possible light, came to the conclusion that the British Premier was most likely "a victim of circumstances". The author traces in his policy the traditions of British diplomacy of the past, which manifested itself in the desire to see the strongest states at each other's throats, while reserving the role of an observer for itself.

However, this time Great Britain failed to preserve even an appearance of the former "brilliant isolation". Nor would anyone envy its position in the context of the general outcome of the war. The world's largest colonial empire collapsed. Fuchser claims that the old diplomacy was doomed due to the fact that Chamberlain's partner in Munich — Hitler — "was no gentleman". But that is a miserable half-truth. The British ruling circles did make a wrong assessment, but not only of their partner. They failed



to see the basic changes in the world and the peculiarities of the international situation on the eve of World War II.

Chamberlain and the people behind him made numerous miscalculations. For example, they erroneously counted on the establishment of an alliance of the four powers—Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy. The authors of that project misunderstood the antagonistic nature of the contradictions between these imperialist states and the specific character of the Nazi brand of imperialism. Chamberlain was naive enough to believe that Austria would become a bone of contention between Hitler and Mussolini and, as a result, Great Britain would be able to break up the Rome-Berlin Axis. The efforts of London diplomacy to create a kaleidoscopic conglomerate of nations under the hegemony of Germany, with its internal contradictory processes which would have broken the monolith of the Nazi regime and made its foreign policy more moderate, ended in failure.

Even before the war many people thought that Chamberlain was diplomatically incompetent. Ivan Maysky repeatedly noted his inexperience. He foresaw the big disappointments which were in store for the British Prime Minister along the road he had chosen and predicted that agreements with the aggressor would lead Chamberlain to a complete failure. However, modern conservative literature separates this idea, which is correct in itself, from the whole complex of phenomena and presents it as the root cause of the policy of "appeasement". One cannot agree with that. Didn't the British leader have at his disposal an apparatus that had large diplomatic experience? Didn't that apparatus pursue the same policy, a policy which was suicidal for Great Britain?

It would be worthwhile to get back to the issue of gentlemen's behavior. Can we accept the premise that on the one side of the negotiating table at Munich there were allegedly decent people and on the other side—indecent? I am under the strong impression that Chamberlain and his ally Daladier had a very narrow interpretation of what it meant to behave like a "gentleman". At best they required that such a behavior be exhibited only in the relations among the four participants of the conference. Their apologists today do the same. But numerous facts disprove this. The description of Chamberlain as a "gentleman" does not correspond, for instance, to his willingness to

sacrifice Spain, Austria, Czechoslovakia and other states. How do his unkept promises, threats and ultimatums fit in with the declarations about the high morals of the British Premier? Pretending to be concerned about the Czechs and the Slovaks, he gave them false promises about economic compensation for the losses they suffered in Munich. On September 7, 1938 Beneš informed the Soviet plenipotentiary representative in Prague that Great Britain and France were exerting wild pressure and making direct threats to leave Czechoslovakia at Hitler's mercy. They were ready to declare Czechoslovakia responsible for war, should it refuse to accept the German ultimatum. The representatives of Czechoslovakia were not even allowed to participate in the conference which decided the future of their country. The text of the Munich Agreement was handed to the Czechoslovak diplomats in the same manner as an act on unconditional capitulation is handed to the representatives of a defeated state.

The words about Chamberlain's "decency" and about "the proud Albion" come to mind in another context. Britain's highest executive went to see Hitler three times, while Hitler never visited Great Britain. The talk between the Czechoslovak envoy to London and the British Foreign Secretary Halifax on September 24, 1938 is rather interesting. According to Lord Halifax, the Prime Minister was convinced that after getting Sudetenland Hitler would leave Europe alone forever. In response to Masaryk's words about such fatal naiveté, Halifax noted that in the Czechoslovak issue Chamberlain was just Hitler's postman. I do not know whether Halifax actually wanted to say that Chamberlain was only fulfilling the will of the reactionary clique. In any case, the implication that he was serving a criminal was quite evident.

The relations between the British and German ruling circles of those times have not yet been fully studied. For instance, the fact that Berlin was extremely well-informed is amazing. In particular, Berlin knew only too well that Great Britain would never enter the war on account of Czechoslovakia. In that light the extreme arrogance of the Nazis becomes more understandable.

Most modern historical works, including conservative ones, condemn in one way or other the Munich Agreement and the policy of "appeasement". In some of them the criticism is reserved, while others criticize it openly and



sharply. The authors of the semiofficial ten-volume *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg* condemn the inability of the Western powers to pursue a resolute policy with regard to Germany and the willingness of the British government to help Germany change the *status quo* in Eastern and Southeast Europe.

The British historian Paul Kennedy has made an attempt to analyze the presentation of various aspects of the policy of "appeasement" in historical literature. It should be noted that in his earlier works he supported the policy. The author considers it wrong to accuse Chamberlain of a lack of morality and weak will. He claims that those who make such accusations do not take into account all the complexities that the British government allegedly faced in the 1930s. But, honestly, I cannot understand the author's position. What do those complexities have to do with morality? How can one justify the other? According to Kennedy, some historians, while discussing the economic, political and strategic aspects of the British policy, ignore the moral and ideological sides of that policy, as well as the personal motives of those who inspired and executed it. Among those motives he names the contempt or indifference that many members of the British government felt for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, fear and, at the same time, admiration of Nazi Germany and Italy, hatred of communism and fear of war.

Kennedy agrees with the arguments of the apologists of the Munich policies: the industrial, financial and military weakness of Great Britain and its main ally France made "appeasement" a "natural and reasonable strategy". However, the arguments and conclusions the author makes in his later works cast doubt on or contradict concepts he defended earlier. Kennedy criticizes what he calls the "sinful" documents of the Treasury and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the military and economic situation in Great Britain. The historiographer believes that Chamberlain used the documents only to justify his policy. Germany's weak spots were completely ignored as was the strong Czech army. Officials repeatedly emphasized the vulnerability of Great Britain from the air. The author asks the quite appropriate question of whether the German air force would have been capable of attacking London at that time if Germany had been fighting in Central Europe.

Kennedy's approach to his research has great potential:

his work contains an analysis of different points of view and preserves all the positive elements of various scientific schools. Moreover, the author presents his own position in a complete and objective manner. The historian succeeded in overcoming some of his previous delusions, but, regrettably, he stopped halfway.

When speaking of the policy of the Western powers on the eve of Munich, I focused the reader's attention primarily on the position of Great Britain. It was the ruling circles of that country which conceived and actively pursued the policy of "appeasement". Hence the increased interest of Western literature in the history of British diplomacy in the 1930s. It should be noted that on the main questions of international policy and especially on the issue of Czechoslovakia, which is an issue which interests us, the ruling circles of France sided with their British ally. Naturally, France was very much interested in an alliance with Britain. Due to its geographical proximity to the aggressors, France was constantly turning to its neighbor across the channel for support. It seemed that a war on three land fronts was a real possibility should the republicans lose the war in Spain. It would also be appropriate to mention the close economic ties between England and France.

Nevertheless, one can hardly accept the view of certain historians that France was virtually a British satellite, blindly and meakly following in its boss's steps. The position of the French ruling circles, no doubt, largely coincided with the position of Chamberlain. On the other hand, France had an effective alternative to the policy of "appeasement". There was a system of treaties between France, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, on the other. That system needed only to be given real content, and the political agreements needed only to be complemented by a concrete military accord and the necessary political will. Under such circumstances, Great Britain would have been in no position to oppose France; on the contrary, it would have had to actively support it. The reader need only turn to the events of the years that followed to see that this was how things really stood.

The attempts of French diplomacy in the fall of 1938 to shift all the responsibility for the treachery of Czechoslovakia to the British contributed to the formation



of the misconception about the subordinate status of France. For example, in his conversation with M. M. Litvinov in September 1938, French Foreign Minister G. Bonnet tried to evade the question of the responsibility of his party. Deliberately keeping silent about his own position, he spoke only about the negative attitude of Great Britain to all the Soviet proposals on rendering collective support to Czechoslovakia. People at that time, including those who actively participated in the diplomatic struggle of those years, had a quite clear understanding of the shameful policy of France. For instance, Zdenek Fierlinger, Minister of the Czechoslovak Embassy in the USSR, spoke on several occasions of the unseemly position of France on the Czechoslovak issue, and about the obvious machinations of Georges Bonnet.

Naturally, the unity of principles did not mean that Great Britain and France were unanimous on details, tactical maneuvering, etc. Full unanimity exists only in the graveyard. It is clear that the French policy toward Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union was more careful and less rigorous than the policy of London. Paris made a much greater effort to conceal for some time its genuine plans.

How can this be explained?

The democratic circles in France were more influential than those in Great Britain. One of the largest communist parties in the world was quite active there. The People's Front was set up, which prevented fascism from dominating the country. Socialist and left-bourgeois politicians stood on firm ground. Britain lacked such outstanding statesmen like L. Barthou and E. Herriot. France had commitments to the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia under the treaties of mutual assistance. Soberminded politicians could indeed be found in Daladier's government, though they constituted a minority. Anti-Sovietism and profascist trends had never had deep roots in that country. Despite the fact that in October 1938 57 per cent of the French approved of the Munich agreement, 70 per cent demanded that no further concessions be made to German Nazism. In February 1939 79 per cent of the people surveyed favored the development of the military potential of France and 76 per cent demanded that force be used if Germany attempted to capture Danzig (Gdańsk). Therefore, any references to pacifism of the population which allegedly determined

the policy of "appeasement" of the Western powers are totally unfounded.

Much attention is devoted in modern literature to the assessment of the position of France during the Czechoslovak crisis. British historian A. Adamthwaite stresses that hatred for Bolshevism was one of the most important factors determining the policy of France. He says that the Soviet Union had reasons to distrust France. He writes that in the fall of 1938 the French government and the military leadership deliberately played down the combat capabilities of the Red Army, ignoring the objective reports from the French ambassador to the Soviet Union R. Coulondre. Coulondre, who emphasized the strength of the Red Army, warned that if the four powers concluded an agreement one of the alternatives left for the Soviet Union would be to sign a pact with Germany. However, that information was disregarded by Paris.

Adamthwaite challenges the argument of most English and French conservative historians about the passiveness of France in the crisis of 1938. He criticizes the formula "Bonnet—the peacemaker, Daladier—the realist". Daladier, who was suspicious of Germany, nevertheless yielded to the pressure from Great Britain. Daladier spoke in favor of Franco-German rapprochement and had a lot to do with the policy of "appeasement". That policy was pursued by France deliberately, resolutely and far more persistently than people used to think. Moreover, many people do not realize to what extent France's policy was independent of the policy of Great Britain. The author believes that after the Munich Conference the search for new agreements with the Nazis became even more intensive. A. Adamthwaite proves that France was not nearly as weak as certain historians contend. He is of the opinion that by deliberately emphasizing the difficulties facing the country, France was attempting to conceal its real potential and remove any responsibility from its leaders' shoulders. A thorough analysis of the foreign policy of France, its position in the world and its internal problems brings A. Adamthwaite to the conclusion that France was very much capable of fighting a war in 1938. The researcher in fact rejects the argument that public opinion was in favor of "appeasement". The British and French governments, if they had really wanted to, could have mobilized public opinion in favor of a more rigid stand on aggressive



Germany. In his article "The British Government and the Media 1937-1938" the author gives many examples proving how strong the pressure on the press was.

What was the role of the United States in the crisis in Central Europe? Can we agree with the view of certain historians that "the Munich dove" (that is how Chamberlain defined his mission) had a purely American origin? Many versions of the US role can be found in world historical literature. Naturally, Roosevelt's position on the Czech issue could not have been consistent, and it was not consistent. He had to maneuver to please both the advocates of the fascist regimes as well as the American liberals and Democrats who held anti-fascist positions. The policy of "appeasement" had influential supporters in US financial and economic circles. Different approaches to the same problems could be found even within Roosevelt's administration. Telford Taylor, a liberal historian, notes that Joseph Kennedy, US Ambassador to Great Britain, and William Bullitt, US Ambassador to France (both of whom were pro-German), were very active at that time. Taylor shows that the ambassadors spread the fear of the German air force, and he draws attention to their anti-Soviet sentiments. Bullitt actively opposed the Franco-Soviet pact and supported a German-French rapprochement. The author refers to a letter that Bullitt wrote to Roosevelt in which he contended that a war between France and Germany would result in the destruction of Western Europe and the spread of Bolshevism across the entire continent. On May 22, 1938 Czechoslovak envoy to Paris S. Osuský said he heard an American diplomat threatening that in an all-out war Czechoslovakia and France would find themselves alone. Another fact casts a shadow on US diplomacy. On September 19, 1938 Masaryk reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia that the US government had been the first to be informed about the new Nazi claims against Czechoslovakia and only after that was the Czech government informed. And how should we evaluate the United States' refusal to participate in an international conference on security in Europe proposed by the Soviet Union in the spring of 1938?

However, we do not have any evidence that it was Roosevelt who inspired the Munich Conference. Roosevelt believed that his message of September 26, 1938 to Hitler and Beneš, in which he called on them to continue their

negotiations with the aim of a peaceful and just resolution of controversial issues, could help them resolve the conflict. Similar messages were sent to the leaders of Great Britain, France, Poland and Hungary. On September 27 Roosevelt proposed holding a conference of all the powers involved—Czechoslovakia, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Great Britain, France, USSR and Italy. On September 28, 1938 the Soviet government addressed the US government with a statement in which it expressed strong support for the US proposal. The Soviet Union also expressed its readiness to participate actively in such a conference. At that time the pro-Munich politicians in the United States, Great Britain and France, in an attempt to conceal their treachery, did their utmost to portray the Munich Agreement as Roosevelt's creation. Certain modern historians hold a similar opinion.

The crisis of 1938 cannot be analyzed without an understanding of the role of the ally of the Western powers—the big bourgeoisie of Czechoslovakia. The documents of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia stress that the ruling circles of the Czech and Slovak bourgeoisie betrayed the country for the sake of their own selfish interests. Some conservative historians today in fact justify that betrayal. For instance, according to P.M.H. Bell, if the Czechs had fought back they would have inevitably driven Europe into war, just as the Poles did in 1939. Actually, the author deprives the peoples of their right to defend their national independence. This is reactionary and simply incorrect thinking; it was impossible to avoid a war by means of endless concessions to imperialists who had set out to conquer the world.

Did Czechoslovakia really have the potential to defend itself? Most definitely. As Soviet diplomats wrote at that time, Czechoslovakia was one of the most democratic and peaceloving states in the capitalist world. Its people had long-standing traditions of cultural and state development. It had earned its independence after many centuries of oppression and it had a highly developed sense of national self-awareness. Many documents of those years and eyewitness reports from people alive at that time testify to the readiness of the Czechoslovak people to defend their republic. And that was the conviction of their friends in the Soviet Union.

A telegram Kamil Krofta, the Minister of Foreign Affairs



of Czechoslovakia, sent on September 24 to the Czechoslovak missions in France, Great Britain and the Soviet Union sheds light upon this issue. He reported that the mobilization in the country was going smoothly and that the people stood firm. He alleged that in the event of aggression 40 Czechoslovak divisions would be ready in a day or two to deal with 80 German divisions. It is clear from the conversation which took place on September 29 between two generals, the Czech Chief of Staff Ludvik Krejči and the Defense Minister J. Syrový, that Czechoslovak soldiers had no intention of surrendering and that the Republic was able to defend itself. The Soviet Union and democratic circles in other countries highly appreciated the specific measures Czechoslovakia took to stop the aggression—a partial mobilization in May of 1938, which prevented Germany from attacking, energetic actions by the authorities against the Nazi uprising in Sudetenland. According to the moderate conservative historian from West Germany Emil Franzel, Czechoslovakia had significantly strengthened its armaments in the 1930's, especially its defensive lines, Maginot style.

So what happened, you might ask. Why, in contrast to Spain, for example, and then underdeveloped Ethiopia, did Czechoslovakia not put up any resistance to the aggressor? Christian Zentner, whom we mentioned earlier, has a very simple explanation for that—"Masaryk's party", like the Trojan horse, was out to destroy Czechoslovakia. Can we consider everyone in Beneš's government a convinced agent of Nazism or British imperialism? I'd like to recall that just before that "Masaryk's party" had been in the vanguard of a revived Czechoslovakia. And all of a sudden ... the Trojan horse?

Of course, there were those who were ready for compromises in the Czechoslovak government, and on March 15, 1939 they signed the republic's death sentence. But there were also genuine patriots, and, as everywhere, people who had doubts. If one associates the Trojan horse with the group of E. Hacha and F. Chvalkovsky, then it can hardly be equated with the "party of Masaryk"; secondly, that group appeared on the political scene in Czechoslovakia after it had already been destroyed by the Munich deal. I would also like to note that the "Trojan horse team" had been formed in Czechoslovakia much earlier, and, by the way, neither Beneš nor other fathers of

democracy had noticed this. Let me remind the reader of the Czechoslovak government's virtual recognition of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia and of Franco's regime in Spain. In March 1938 Krofta once again affirmed his people's readiness to defend their country. At the same time, he labeled virtually the entire party of the government coalition a "panic stricken camp". Could it be that it was they who betrayed the country in September? Schkrach did not suspect Beneš, but Schkrach had strong suspicions with respect to that man's close entourage. Hitler's hatred for Beneš proves that Schkrach's observation was correct.

Beneš, as many other liberal bourgeois leaders, was an extremely contraversial figure. He deserves credit for participating in the establishment of the European system of collective security in the 1930s and in the creation of the antifascist coalition during World War II. His name is associated with the enhanced cooperation of Czechoslovakia with the Soviet Union and the strengthening of Czechoslovakia's defense. I'm not in a position to judge whether Beneš sincerely belived that Great Britain and France would not leave his country defenseless, and that it was able to defend itself, if necessary, without their assistance. At any rate, Beneš never had any doubts about the Soviet Union living up to its obligations to Czechoslovakia.

Nevertheless, throughout his entire career Beneš was more persistent in pursuing a different line. In a conversation with the British envoy to Prague on May 18, 1938 he emphasized that the relations of his country with Russia had been and would continue to be of secondary importance, and that they depended on the position of France and Great Britain. Beneš said that if they lost interest in a Franco-Russian Treaty, Czechoslovakia would follow suit, and that any contacts with Russia would be made via the West. Beneš also asked Lord Walter Runciman to tell Chamberlain that if a war did break out, Czechoslovakia still had no special agreements with Russia and would not initiate any action without consulting France. It should be noted that the danger of acting in circumvention of the Soviet Union was obvious to a number of soberminded bourgeois leaders of Western countries even in September 1938. That makes Beneš's blunder all the more inexcusable.

On occasion Beneš would make anti-communist attacks which were criticized even within his party. In a letter to Beneš dated June 25, 1938 Stefan Osuský wrote that at that point communists were the most ardent patriots, and that the workers of Czechia were ready to fight for their Fatherland. In the face of war it was unreasonable and unjust to put up obstacles to the communists. He stated in no uncertain terms that any anti-communist manifestations served the purposes of Nazism. The historical blunder Beneš made became absolutely obvious after it became clear what the aggressors and the "peacemakers" had done to his country in Munich. All that was left of Czechoslovakia was a fictitious state whose economy, transportation system, finances and defense lay in ruins. The regions of the country which had been invaded accounted for over 66 per cent of the country's coal, 70 per cent of its metalworks, 80 per cent of its textile and chemical industry, and 70 per cent of its energy resources.

Beneš and those whose interests he represented were afraid of their own people and were unwilling to rely on the people and use their enthusiasm. Their anti-communism, and, as a result, their refusal to accept Soviet aid, proved to be very costly not only to Czechoslovakia but to many other states as well; with Beneš, parochial interests triumphed over national, and even international interests. He understood only too well that Czechoslovakia was only a beginning.

Thus, the Munich policy of the Western powers contemplated as "appeasement" of Europe and the world turned out to be treachery for small countries and direct encouragement of the aggressors who threatened to destroy all of world civilization.

## Non-Marxist Historians on Soviet Policy During the 1938 Crisis in Central Europe

The policy of the Soviet Union in 1938, as in the 1920s and 1930s in general, was based primarily on the Leninist principles of peaceful coexistence and on the struggle for the establishment of a system of collective security in Europe. That struggle was waged in extremely complex

circumstances. At that time the Soviet Union was not a "superpower", as it is called today in the West. Then the concept of "capitalist encirclement" had not only a geographical but also a socio-economic, political and military content. That concept undoubtedly had a negative effect on the development of the Soviet Union.

By no means was the anti-Soviet factor the only factor in the policy of the ruling circles of the bourgeois powers belonging to the two rival groupings. There were also inter-imperialist contradictions, the fear of progressive movements in metropolies and colonies and other factors. However, the anti-Soviet course was one of the leading ones. At present many bourgeois historians do not conceal the fact that the policy of "appeasement" was inherently an anti-Soviet policy, and they quite widely and unambiguously speak of that.

It was back in the 1920s that the Entente countries established the so-called "Cordon Sanitaire" which included over ten Western neighbors of the Soviet Union, mainly countries which had reactionary regimes. It was designed to isolate Western Europe from Soviet influence. The reactionary circles in Great Britain and the United States didn't even abandon the idea of having such a barrier during WW II, and this was evident, in particular, during the Teheran Conference. I have already referred to Andreas Hillgruber who mentions the unfulfilled project of establishing a Danube Federation and the plans to establish a second front in the Balkans. Hillgruber stresses the role of Yugoslav communists in foiling the attempts to rebuild the "cordon", and the determination with which the emigrant government of Czechoslovakia, "under the influence of the Munich complex", abandoned its plans to join an anti-Soviet federation during WW II and improved relations with the Soviet Union. On December 12, 1943 the two countries concluded the Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Cooperation after War.

Modern literature highlights one of the main directions in the foreign policy of the Western powers in the 1920s and 1930s—the intention to use German militarists against the USSR. The imperialists never tried to keep this intention a secret. During a talk with Hitler in Obersalzberg on November 19, 1937, Lord Halifax, who on behalf of the British government had given Germany the go-ahead to invade Austria and Czechoslovakia, stated that Germany



had the right to consider itself a stronghold of the West in the battle against Bolshevism.

The policy aimed at the establishment of an anti-Soviet stronghold in Europe had a strong ideological and political foundation. According to Telford Taylor, some of the French shared the hostility of Chamberlain's government toward socialists and communists. Some of them believed that "there was more to fear from Red Russia than Brown Germany—that Hitler might even serve as a barrier against the spread of Bolshevism". Taylor claims that the fear in the fall of 1938 that a victorious war against Germany could open the way for the Soviets to the West made certain British leaders decide against resolving that conflict by military means. The United States, for its part, feared that Germany would become increasingly weak, and as a result would give in to Bolshevism. That is how the author explains the notorious plans of Dawes and Young [1] One of the main goals of "appeasement" was to save the Nazi regime in Germany at any cost. That goal determined the policy of the reactionary leaders of the Western powers for a long period of time.

A relatively extensive description is found in bourgeois literature of the intention of Western diplomacy to isolate the Soviet Union from European international affairs. Historians of various schools are often unanimous in their negative assessment of the decision of the Munich four to act in circumvention of the Soviet Union, thereby excluding it from European politics. According to them, Munich destroyed all hopes for collective security. As Paul Kluke says, the signing of the agreement without consulting the Soviet Union was not just "a rude discourtesy", for it left the USSR in isolation at a time when it faced the threat of a German attack.

The policy of "appeasement" was directly inspired by the Nazis. German propaganda was shouting about the danger of Bolshevism engulfing Czechoslovakia. Hitler bluntly demanded that Chamberlain get rid of the treaties of the Soviet Union with Czechoslovakia and France. In full accordance with that demand the British government, in a letter to the government of Czechoslovakia dated

[1] The plans established the order of Germany's payment of reparations to the countries that were victorious in WW I. They were drafted in 1924 and 1929-30, respectively, under the supervision of two American bankers, Charles Gates Dawes and Owen Young.

September 27, 1938, insisted that the entire system of treaty relations with Czechoslovakia be reviewed.

But can we really assert, as certain historians do, that Western leaders intended to use the Nazis to "destroy the Soviet Union"? It seems that this is, at the very least, too categorical a statement. One should not portray those leaders as hopelessly stupid. The destruction of the Soviet Union by Germany could have led to such build-up of its power that any diplomatic combinations of London and Paris would have been useless. Their objective, it seems, was different—to let the USSR and Germany fight it out, wear each other down, and then dictate the conditions of peace from a position of strength. According to Axel Kuhn, Great Britain, France and the United States hoped that in the long run the aggression would be directed against the Soviet Union. David E. Kaiser is of the opinion that the Munich agreement destroyed the last effective barrier to German military expansion in Eastern Europe. In France many historians believe that French diplomacy at least did not oppose the Nazi aggression in Eastern Europe. British liberal historian Jonathan Haslam puts it even stronger, according to him, French politicians wanted to "wash their hands of their obligations to Prague and leave the Russians in direct confrontation with the Germans without any aid from the West".

Despite the difficult situation Soviet diplomacy did not stop trying to find ways of establishing a system of collective security, though certain historians, without providing any facts, claim that it did stop trying. The Soviet Union observed in good faith the treaties it had concluded and tried to broaden their scope; it consistently condemned all acts of aggression. The USSR proceeded not only from its own national interests but also from the interests of all states.

Even before the German-Czechoslovak crisis broke out the USSR had officially confirmed its unswerving readiness to live up to its obligations as an ally of the Czechoslovak government. On April 26, 1938 Mikhail Kalinin, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, noted that the USSR, France and Czechoslovakia had decided to work together to ensure Czechoslovakia's defense from an aggressor. As was noted above, Kalinin added that the pact did not exclude the possibility of the Soviet Union or Czechoslovakia helping each other without waiting for



France. On September 20, in response to a letter from Beneš the Soviet side once again stated in no uncertain terms that it would fulfil its obligations, provided that Czechoslovakia defended itself and asked for aid. Those reservations at that time were of tremendous significance because the USSR's adversaries could accuse the Soviet Union of committing aggressive actions.

The same line was pursued by the Soviet side in its negotiations with representatives of other countries. Thus, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union Litvinov, in a talk with German Ambassador to Moscow Werner von der Schulenburg on August 22, 1938, made it clear that if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia the Soviet Union would keep its promise and would do all it could to defend the country.

Soviet representatives in Prague, Paris and other Western capitals went to great lengths to organize a meeting of military leaders from the Soviet Union, France, Czechoslovakia and all other interested states. The French government (to a lesser degree, the government of Czechoslovakia) ignored those Soviet proposals. It should be recalled that in the summer of 1939, when there was once again a need to add concrete military agreements to the political accords, Western countries continued to pursue the same policy of sabotage.

Many works by bourgeois historians of the FRG, Great Britain, France and other countries contain a relatively objective analysis of the Soviet Union's position during the Czechoslovak crisis. Historians in West Germany have noted the willingness of the Soviet Union to fulfil its obligations to defend Czechoslovakia and its readiness to uphold Czechoslovakia's independence. Michael Bartsch and his colleagues provide proof that even before the Munich agreement the Soviet Union repeatedly advanced the idea to Western powers of holding a conference with a view to preventing aggression and ensuring international guarantees for Czechoslovakia. However, the anti-communist stance of the political leaders of those countries made the efforts of the Soviet government meaningless. Julius Braunthal, a social democrat and historian from Austria, made the correct observation that the USSR was ready to help Czechoslovakia, while Daladier and Chamberlain didn't want to run the risk of fighting a war for one country. But when they gave up that "one country"

without fighting, the Western powers only brought the aggressor closer to their own borders.

The Soviet proposals met with a similar reaction in Great Britain and the United States. The authors of the collective work entitled *Der Zweite Weltkrieg* note that in 1937-1939 the Soviet Union was ready, together with Great Britain and France, to support any measures, including measures involving the use of force, to preserve the *status quo*. But the British gave a "cold shoulder" to the Soviet proposal. Telford Taylor wrote that the Soviet efforts to resolve the crisis through building a system of collective security were destroyed against British rocks. The Soviet proposals fell on deaf ears in London; Chamberlain and his colleagues in their political aspirations simply ignored the Soviet Union. Taylor believes that the Soviet initiatives deserved consideration. He does not doubt that the Soviet Union would have given support to Prague, but the effectiveness of that aid would have depended on the determination and energetic actions of Great Britain and France. Of the five countries (Belgium, Great Britain, Poland, the USSR, and the United States) with treaty obligations to France, the only one to urge France to fulfill its obligations to Czechoslovakia was the Soviet Union. Taylor contends that the efforts of the others were aimed at convincing France to default.

Some bourgeois historians (for example, P. Bell, R. Douglas, G. Herndon, G. Weinberg), without questioning the sincere desire of the Soviet Union to help Czechoslovakia, claim that in those years it was simply unable to provide any effective aid.

They refer to the repressions in 1937 and 1938 of Soviet party and state functionaries, including leading military commanders who were extremely competent, had progressive approaches to the concept of waging modern wars, and understood well the role of new types of weapons, and of new strategies and tactics of war.

It is a fact that the repressions were extremely damaging to the Soviet state, to its defense potential and to its international prestige. However, those repressions did not change the nature of the socialist system, or the foundation of the Soviet state. The Red Army was able to compensate for the severe losses in the ranks of its commanders. A vivid example of its real strength was the outcome of WW II.

The policy of the Soviet Union following the Munich





agreement is of particular interest. Historians of various schools focus their attention on the Soviet-German Pact concluded on August 23, 1939, on Germany's initiative. The distorted versions of that event constitute one of the major falsifications of modern history. However, those versions are countered by relatively objective assessments of the Pact in nonconservative studies.

Some non-Marxist historians view the Pact, or, to be more precise, the conclusion of the Pact, in the context of the Munich agreement. Wolfgang Wippermann, one of the co-authors of the multi-volume work *Deutschland* (FRG), comes to the reasonable conclusion that the "threat of German and national revanchism and expansionism" emerged at the same time as the policy of "appeasement". But the author considers the Pact of August 23 to be the result of some sort of "Soviet policy of appeasement", a policy Wippermann himself invented.

Wippermann disregards certain factors of fundamental importance. "Appeasement" was the policy of those states which had been victorious in WW I. They freely chose their policy of encouraging the aggressor. They deliberately feeded the Nazi beast and trained it to attack the Soviet Union. "Appeasement" was a policy of sacrificing to the aggressor one country after another. "Appeasement" was a flagrant violation of international law and human morals. The "peacemakers" followed their evil course despite the active position of the USSR which proposed that a system of collective security be created.

But the diplomatic action of the Soviet government of August 23, 1939 was not the result of a free choice. The only alternative to the German proposal to conclude that Pact was a war against the powers of the fascist alliance. The intervention of major imperialist countries was also a possibility. The Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact fully corresponded to all ethical and legal norms. It did not infringe upon anyone's interests and did not close the door to the establishment of a system of collective security in Europe, or in the world as a whole, for that matter. I'd like to remind the reader that non-aggression pacts with Nazi Germany had been concluded by the governments of Great Britain, France, Poland and other bourgeois states long before that. However, in those days the Pact concluded by the Soviet Union brought about a real uproar of anti-Soviet

hysteria in the West; and the echo of that uproar can still be heard today.

Imperialist propaganda, basing its assertions on speculations about the Pact, tries to make it look as though the Soviet Union was also responsible for the outbreak of WW II. In reality, however, the world had been slipping toward war since 1931—long before the Pact of August 23 was concluded—as a result of the aggressive actions of Japan, Italy and Germany against China, Ethiopia, Spain, Austria, Czechoslovakia, the USSR, Mongolia, and Lithuania. The Pact had nothing to do with the aggression against Poland either. The timing of the aggression—no later than September 1, 1939—had been set by the German government back on April 3, 1939. Numerous documents have been published in the West in recent years which unveil the real objectives of German Nazism in Central, Southeastern, and Eastern Europe, as well as its concrete military and political plans in those regions. Those documents definitely contradict the anti-Soviet interpretations of the Pact of August 23.

## Conclusion

The Munich agreement of 1938 was recognized as illegal by three of its participants even before the war had ended. The government of the GDR annulled the agreement which was stated in a declaration issued in 1960, and the Treaty of Friendship signed by the GDR and the CSSR in 1967 reaffirmed that. In 1966 the government of the FRG declared that it had no territorial claims to Czechoslovakia. The world public, however, demanded that the agreement be recognized as void from the moment it was signed. In 1973 protracted negotiations between the FRG and the CSSR came to a successful conclusion. The preamble of the Treaty of Mutual Relations between the two countries stipulated that the Munich agreement had been imposed under the threat of force and was declared null and void.

In fact, a negative assessment of the Treaty dominates modern historical literature of all trends, including conservative trends. The "Munich deal" has become an accepted expression in the political dictionary of modern times.

Many bourgeois historians have shown that the designs of the aggressors and of those who tried to "appease" them were not only immoral but also unrealistic. Actually, every new concession made the insatiable appetite of the aggressors grow even more. The Western leaders failed to prevent a new world war, to preserve their imperialist positions and to keep fascist regimes, which were supposed to play the major anti-revolutionary role, from collapsing. The attempt to weaken the Soviet state and the socialist system also failed.

Let me return to the title of this brochure

*Munich: Mistake or Cynical Calculation?* There are some historians, biographers and publicists who categorically demand a definite answer to this question. But historical studies show that the leaders of the fascist dictatorships, as well as the governments following the policy of "appeasement", were plagued by misconceptions and, moreover, had criminal intentions. This was a result of the class approaches and theoretical narrow-mindedness of the immoral politicians and diplomats of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

A number of liberal and left socialist historians believe that after the Munich agreement the Soviet government had little reason to believe that there were any substantial differences between the policy of the fascist states and that of the non-fascist states. The spiritual kinship between "appeasement" and the anti-communist platform of the fascists was too obvious. Those factors, however, cannot entirely explain or justify the indiscriminate approach of Soviet diplomacy and propaganda after the Munich agreement. Subsequent developments showed that there were quite a few soberminded politicians in the ruling circles of Great Britain, France and the United States who saw the dangers fascism posed to mankind. Those forces were largely responsible for the creation of the 1942-1945 anti-fascist coalition.

The war was not prevented. But the lessons of the struggle for peace in the 1930s were nonetheless fruitful. Today those lessons are more important than ever before, for the world is beginning to realize the need for a new political thinking. The experience of the joint struggle against fascism, a struggle which united communists, social democrats, bourgeois democrats, humanists, pacifists, and the cooperation of the Soviet Union with bourgeois states for the sake of peace—all that should not disappear without a trace. The lessons of 1938 should now serve the task of building an effective coalition of all peaceloving forces, a coalition capable of preventing a nuclear catastrophe.

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